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WILLIAM AND BILL

WILLIAM AND BILL

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THE CENTURY CO.
1914

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TO
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AND
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THE WILLIAM AND BILL OF THIS BOOK

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WILLIAM AND BILL

WILLIAM AND BILL

I

HIS NAME

HERE'S William?" Aunt Amelia, slender, clad in discreet widow's weeds, leading a patient small boy by the hand, made her inquiry.

"Bill's around somewhere," responded his mother from the porch steps. "Won't you come in?"

Mrs. William Harvey, daughter-in-law of William Harvey the First, Rector of St. Jude's, relict of William Harvey the Second, mother of an emulous William Harvey the Third, continued her near-sighted progress between the flower-beds, reached the porch and stretched up a hand to her sister-in-law, Mrs. James Harvey, mother of another William the Third, whom his irreverent parents nick-named Bill.

"Thank you, dear. I'll just send William into the house to play with his cousin, and you and I will sit here, if you don't mind."

"All right," agreed little Mrs. Harvey, sinking

down on the step. She had always in dealing with her sister-in-law the sensation of a clumsy boy handling a setting of eggs. She made haste to agree, almost before she understood what she was agreeing to.

"Run on, William," she chirruped now, "Bill 's in the back yard with Poly Bony."

"Oh — do you have Candy's Napoleon Bonaparte split your kindling?" inquired Amelia Harvey, settling her black skirts about her, leaning her shoulders timidly against a porch pillar. "Aunt Candace washes for me the same as she does for you, but I 've found that boy of hers too trifling — besides I don't like the association for William."

"Poly Bony is n't much account," agreed Ruth Harvey, briefly; "but he adores Billy-boy. That 's the only reason I put up with him."

The widow made a deprecating sound in her throat, glanced out over the trim lines of blossoming nasturtiums, geraniums and foliage plants that made Ruth Harvey's front yard gay under its maples.

"B — b — Bill," she finally murmured, "it seems dreadful to nick that grand old name in such a way. When you remember what his grandfather, William the First, is, what my dear husband, William the Second, was, it seems almost — sacrilegious, does n't it?"

"I don't know," debated Bill's mother blithely. "His father 's always called him that. It 's more convenient. You certainly ought not to object, Amelia. You were living in the West when James gave Billy his name. Now, since you 've moved back

here it would make lots of confusion to have two William Harveys right in one town — each coming on to be a William the Third. I guess our boy had better stay Bill."

The lady in black looked almost tearful.

"Why, bless your heart, James and I don't mind," said Ruth Harvey anxiously. "If William and Bill between them can represent the name, I don't see why there should be any trouble about their sharing it. What 's the matter, William?"

"I did n't like to stay there," said the small William gently, sitting down between the two women. "I like to hear you talk."

"Darling!" exclaimed his mother. "He 's always just so. He can't bear to be away from me."

"I 'm afraid Bill was n't nice to him," said Bill's mother. "I 'll go out there with him in a minute. What 's that you were telling me the other day about those people that 've moved into the old Beecham property, Amelia?"

The sun shone on Ruth Harvey's flowers, a little wind tossed through them and rifled their perfume to carry it to the group on the porch. The two women settled themselves for a quiet chat.

"Why, they tell me that the woman is Missouri Starr — you remember those Starrs that were such rich people before the war, and they 've all had such tragic histories?"

Ruth nodded.

"Well, the family has come down to this Missouri Starr. She used to be a great beauty and a belle.

Father says"—she alluded to William the First, Rector of St. Jude's—"that he can remember when she was considered the most beautiful woman in the South, and that there were all sorts of stories about her marrying a title, or being engaged to some man or other, I've forgotten who, that was in President Davis's cabinet. She's had a stormy history and now there's nobody left but herself and these two little children—grandchildren of her brother. She never married—and that was a tragedy, too, something about a young missionary and she loved him but would n't marry him unless he'd give up his divine calling. He gave up her instead, went out to some cannibal place, and was killed—eaten, too, maybe. Do you believe in first love, Ruth—believe it's the strongest, I mean?"

Bill's mother, aware that her saintly sister-in-law had been engaged before she married the Reverend William, opined that first or second or third was good enough if you bestowed it on the right man.

"Seems to me Miss Missouri Starr's foolish to give up at the first failure," she concluded with twinkling eyes. "I hope she finds some good man here in Watauga."

"My dear," returned the other, "you would n't expect it if you'd ever seen her. She's awful. She's a schismatic—I think that's what father called it. She started up a new religion, and preaches on street corners and out in groves. She does n't believe in the adornment of the body, and so she makes all of her followers wear a kind of calico slip and leave their

hair hanging. They go barefoot and bare-headed, too. Is n't it dreadful?"

"It seems a good deal like most of the accounts we have of primitive Christianity; but I suppose it would horrify a rector, and a rector's wife," said Ruth tolerantly.

"She 's taken every cent she has in the world and bought the Beecham place and there she hunts up all sorts of off-scourings — people that won't pay their debts and folks that ought to be in the poor-house, or the work-house, and they live off of her while she keeps preaching to them all this foolishness about going barefoot and wearing black calico slips — as though that was righteousness. Father says they victimize her materially and she victimizes them spiritually, and that she is n't doing her duty by those children. The little boy ought to be in school — he surely ought. The baby 's a girl, and the sweetest thing you ever saw!"

William's large, soft blue eyes had traveled from his mother's face to his aunt's. He watched the movement of their lips as they spoke. To Ruth Harvey's thinking he was unhealthily interested in the doings of his elders.

"Was that the baby girl you wanted to adopt?"

The widow bent her head.

"I told that woman the sort of home I would expect to give an adopted daughter, and the sort of training, and she talked as though the only salvation for anybody was to go around in a black calico slip and listen to her crazy nonsense."

"I can say my Sunday school lesson," interrupted William, moved to show his Christian training.

"Say it then, you sweet thing," prompted his aunt.

William folded his hands on his knee. He had the air of a china ornament to be taken down and dusted and put back on the shelf.

"What can little hands do? Put your penny in the plate. Stop pinchin' that boy. Don't pull that girl's curls. Sampson had a jaw that slewed —"

Aunt Ruth's laughter broke in upon the recitation.

"I think you 've got some of that wrong, dearie," his mother deprecated.

"Billy says it that way. He was sayin' it just now out in the back yard," said the small man with unexpected resolution. "Bill knows."

"Where is — your boy?" inquired Mrs. Amelia rather primly. She would n't call her nephew Bill, and William was sacred to her own son.

"Out in the back yard with Poly Bony," repeated Ruth.

"No," maintained William, slightly soured by the failure of his Sunday school recitation. "Bill 's gone away."

Mrs. Amelia got to her feet with a little cry. She was so easily upset that she kept Ruth continually on pins.

"You ought n't to trust him with that faithless negro," she cried. "There 's no telling what might happen to him!"

Ruth laughed a little, but started through the house

with William trotting at her heels. The telephone rang.

"Go on — go on," gasped the widow. "I 'll stop and answer this — you 've got to think of your boy!"

Half an hour before, Napoleon Bonaparte, the diminutive African who chored for a few patient ladies in Ruth Harvey's quarter of the town, had decided in his own mind that the kindling he had cut was sufficient. It was folly to subdivide wood till it burned away even while the fire was being replenished. A big heap meant extravagance in use. Slipping through an opening in the back fence, the chore-boy would have made off down the lane; but he saw Bill preparing to follow.

"Me go wiv Poly Bony," wheedled the thrush-sweet tones as the sturdy white-socked legs trotted boldly after. The emperor looked furtively over his ragged shoulder. Perforce he waited for the trailing, white-clad, yellow-haired one to come close enough to tread his shadow, that a low tone might be used in remonstrance. Then, teeth set, eyes baleful, the pursued spoke his mind:

"Look heah, white chile," he hissed, "I ain't gwine have you taggin' me around no moah. I ain't no nuss. Huccome yo' mammy take me faw one?"

"Go wiv Poly Bony," Bill announced inexorably.

"Ef you goes wid me I 'll put ye in a sack and frow ye in de ribber," the black boy threatened, rolling his eyes fearfully.

"Wiver!" Bill fluttered like a young bird eager to fly. "Nice Poly Bony frow Bill in wiver!"

"I 'se gwine put ye in a sack fust," Napoleon painstakingly elucidated, "an' dat sack 'll be might' nigh full o' rocks. An' I 'll tie yo' hands, an' I 'll tie yo' feets. I 'se plum wo' out wid you, I is."

Bill twinkled with delight.

"Ess pick up ee wocks now, Poly," he coaxed, bending over to suit the action to the word.

"You gwan home!" Napoleon tossed a pebble toward the russet sandals that stood so squarely in his path.

"Bill frow rocks, too," and a shower of small stones came Poly Bony's way. The baby boy had some skill and no conscientious scruples. It was like battling with an angel who took unfair advantage of the divinity that hedged him in.

Napoleon, unable to retaliate in kind, curled a shabby coat corner over his face and studied the situation. He dared not take the baby home. Mrs. Harvey would offer him a piece of pie to stay and play with her son. He dare not turn and flee at the risk of having a tearful tornado in skirts swift upon his heels, screeching his name till windows opened and policemen took notice.

After all there is no place like home when the hounds of failure are hot on your trail. Napoleon set out dourly for Soapsuds Alley, a locality characterized by a pervasive scent of yellow soap, the souse and thud of soiled clothing on washboards, the sight of bending backs, and full, fluttering clothes-lines. He went by devious ways, that his shame might not be seen, threading obscure back yards; and though this

made the distance considerable, Bill footed it manfully.

The spirit of the public school was in Napoleon; his mates there had already dubbed him "nurse boy" because they had once seen Bill following him from house to house. He would not fall lower in their estimation. As he neared the cabin he heard a rhythmic sound of hands that rubbed upon a washboard, of splashing suds, and of a rich, golden contralto that informed the summer air:

> I 's on my way to heaven, I is —
> Glory! Glory!

Napoleon stood still in his tracks and howled:

"Mammy, come an' gittim. Dishyer white chile 'bout to run me crazy. He done tag me home!"

Alas for Poly Bony! Aunt Candace had never known the public schools where new ideals are taught her race; but she knew a honey-boy in perfectly good clothes when she saw one. She ran and shut Queen, the surly hound, in the kitchen. Then she picked "mammy's precious" up and planted him, gurgling with delight, in the midst of Queen's numerous, squirming family. Aunt Candace knew how to please a baby.

"You set yo'self right down dar and watch him," she admonished the stricken Napoleon. "Don't you go slippin' off, niggah, an' let anything happen to dishyer baby. Ef you does, I 's gwine wah you plumb out when I gits my hands on you next."

Half-way to the washtub, she remembered hospitality in the way of refreshments, and placed the mo-

lasses dish where her gold and white guest could dip happy fingers in it.

She was in the midst of her labors and a hymn when pandemonium seemed to break loose on the back porch. Aided and abetted, if not incited, by his caretaker, Billy had tied the tail of the cat to the similar appendage belonging to one of the puppies.

The cat had fully wakened to the situation when the old woman reached the scene. Bill was burrowing his head under a wave of agitated small canines, while the cat spit and clawed and every puppy of the bunch yelped disapproval. Queen, in the pantry, heard the voices of her offspring and leaped among the crockery, splashing in the buttermilk jar.

"Foh de Lawd's sake!" Aunt Candace was nimble for her size. Like a corpulent black cyclone she whirled from object to object; released the frantic feline, set Bill up and kissed him, cuffed Napoleon on general principles, and reached Queen in time to save some of the buttermilk — she left the door open, and Poly Bony, not being in a mood to strenuously oppose the mother dog when she saw a stranger wiping molasses-smeared hands on the coats of her yelping family, Aunt Candace had again to rescue her guest, and once more just in time.

"Po' honey lamb!" The big voice gurgled as a strong, flat foot shot out to kick Queen in the ribs and the big black hands lifted Bill to safety. "Was mammy's precious baby hurt?"

Perched on her extensive front, Bill grinned blissfully. Queen had only torn his dress, and this new

sort of play in which everybody took a hand was delightful.

"Play s' more," he urged.

The big black woman gave him an ecstatic hug. "Aunt Candy's gotter git dat ar' washin' out," she apologized. "Heah, you Poly Bony, stir yo'self — show him de pretties in de gyarden."

Sullenly followed by a large-lipped small African, Bill made for the coal pile at the back of the house. While Aunt Candace rubbed rhythmically and sang melodiously at the front, to her ears there came a shriek of anger.

"You Poly Bony," she commanded, "'muse dat chile. Don't you let him cry. Don't you never let a child scream dat-a-way. You do what he wants. Heah me? You do what he wants!"

Napoleon Bonaparte looked mutely to heaven for justice. Perhaps the celestial regions were out of the article at that moment. The demand of Bill was to shovel coal into Poly Bony's hat, Poly Bony to hold the hat. A fire shovel and a sturdy boy baby made soot and dust fly for several moments. Poly Bony had some hope that his mother's injustice might result in clouds of coal-dust on the drying clothes. But when he had received, incidentally, two showers among his facial embellishments, he found inspiration.

"Does you like pigs?" he inquired in a hoarse whisper, glancing in the direction from which came the musical announcement that his mother was still on her way to glory.

"Pigs!" echoed Bill ecstatically, and dropped the

fire shovel to follow Poly Bony's stealthy footsteps, treading in elaborate imitation of his guide's gait.

In a sty which hid itself demurely behind Aunt Candace's premises, in a dip of land running down to the river, were two grunting porkers, household wealth and family pets at one and the same time.

"Dishyer is a good box for you to git up on," Napoleon obligingly pointed out. With tremulous eagerness he watched the fat legs mount, and the yellow head peer over the rails of the pen. Then he slipped to the bank, crouched, and ran. He would go to Mrs. Harvey and say to her, "Please, ma'am, white lady, huccome you put yo' chile off on me? I ain't like him so very well as you thinks I does. He kin frow rocks like a plumb little devil!" Oh, he 'd tell her the truth for once. He 'd say, "I done lef' him in a pig pen an' you can g'long dar and git him."

As these bold thoughts, worthy of his name, went through the small, woolly head, Napoleon spied three of his mates walking on the river bank. Under any other circumstances his first care would have been to hide himself from them in his present predicament; but Babe Jackson held a rope and to the end of that rope was attached an ancient and leaky boat of plank, which bumped along in the shallows as the boys ran.

"Pull 'er in, Babe. Pull 'er in an' we 'll all take a ride," bellowed Zack Elder.

This was too much for Napoleon Bonaparte. His knees sprung straight and pried him up almost without his own consent.

"What you-all boys doin'?" he inquired gruffly.

"We 'se projeckin' round foh a piece o' plank to paddle wif," Wash Barnes explained. "Ef we could git it, we 'd git in and ride plumb past de sawmill — dat 's what we 'd do."

Napoleon turned a glance of agony towards the direction from which he had come. Leaning against that pigsty was a long, slender clapboard which would make an elegant paddle. He finally explained the situation to his confrères.

"An' I ain't a-goin' back dar' for it nohow," he concluded. "Ef I does, dat white chile gwine mount me de minute he see me, and want to go 'long. You-all boys is wantin' dat plank — why'n't some o' ye go git it?"

Why, indeed? The voice of Candace softened by distance to a mere flutey murmur, reached them where they stood by the deep, muddy, swirling little stream. Only the son of Candace dare rob that Ethiop queen — and he knew it. With a short yelp, as of physical agony, he turned and ran up the bank. In a moment he came back with the improvised paddle in his hand, and with an inconceivably dirty baby tumbling after him.

"Poly Bony! Poly Bony!" shouted the atom of a dominant race. "Bill go wiv Poly Bony."

The four little negroes stared, shivering a bit at the wonderful fire of those eager eyes. Bill had taken an excursion inside the pen — the mercy that takes care of such youngsters saved him from the assaults of the larger pig, but there was nothing left unsmeared about him save his eyes.

"I felled in where piggies was," he amplified their information. "Been in little bed where piggies eats — till Poly Bony comed for me to go in boat."

"What you bring dat white chile heah for. We dare n't to take him in no boat," quavered Andrew Jackson half-heartedly.

Napoleon now held the paddle as well as the unwelcome passenger. He smiled.

"Dat white woman ain't paid me faw de las' kindlin' I cut," he said. "I ain't keerin' what comes o' her chile. 'Sides ef we leave him go back, mammy 'll git us ashore."

The sun glinted on the water, the boat — the beautiful boat had a music beneath its prow that no siren ever equaled. It sang of high emprise. Napoleon's financial statement carried weight. Haste was indicated lest Candace overhaul them.

"Wattah could n't drownd him," Jackson spat out as they ran to the river edge.

The lurching old shell was drawn close; Zack steadied it while Napoleon gathered up Bill on his hip, and, never relinquishing the paddle of office, waded through the shallows and stowed the baby in the stern. The four climbed aboard. Napoleon sat on the paddle till negotiations were complete, then rose and pushed with it to free the boat. She stuck. He jammed harder. She moved a bit, and with one last heave came loose suddenly and shot down the stream. Napoleon fell to his knees and the precious paddle dropped in the water far behind them.

"Now you done it, niggah," accused Wash promptly.

"Nevah wanted him along, wid dat white chile, nohow," piped Zack.

"Might 'a' knowed a nuss boy would bring us bad luck," Andrew capped the sheaf of insult.

"Bill get ee stick," announced the white child, scrambling perilously to climb over the side.

"You set down — an' set still," whimpered Poly Bony, grasping the short skirts, demanding miracles without winking.

The old boat rocked and swayed. The boys scrabbled about in her, trying to reach the floating paddle. Water seeped in at seams and trickled agreeably over Billy's feet and legs, from which he promptly kicked off socks and shoes.

"Be still dar — you 'd drownd anybody," admonished Napoleon fretfully.

"Bill drownd — Bill drownd!" intoned the unwelcome one cheerfully.

"We 's all going to be drownded — date cain't swim — in 'bout free minutes," howled Andrew, trying to bale with a leaky tomato can.

Back at James Harvey's home Bill's mother had run a little way down the lane, laughing and pulling William along looking to see if her small boy had followed Napoleon Bonaparte to his next job. It appeared, however, that hers was the last kindling — a scanty last — which Poly Bony had split that afternoon. As he turned back toward home William rolled his large blue eyes up to her and remarked,

"Mama 's cryin'."

She ran hastily into the house to find Amelia Harvey hysterical, the receiver of the telephone pulled off in her hand.

"Mother Missouri," she burst out. "I went to the 'phone and she was ringing up. She says she 's sick a-bed — at the Beecham place, you know — she can see the river."

At the mention of that fateful word Ruth Harvey stiffened and paled a bit.

"The river," she echoed, her voice dropping abruptly a half octave and sounding guttural in its sudden terror. "Has Poly Bony taken Bill to the river?"

"Oh," moaned Amelia, "poor little Billy — and to think I grudged him the name. Oh, I 'm being punished for my sins. Hurry! Run — let 's hurry!"

There was no need to admonish Bill's mother as to speed; that word river had set her flying as fast as her feet would carry her in the direction of Soapsuds Alley, because it lay between her and the river.

Aunt Candace, rubbing happily at her tubs in the front yard, saw a couple of pale, distracted faces above the line of hollyhocks that edged her garden, and a piteous voice cried out upon her.

"Aunt Candace, where 's Poly Bony?"

Then another supplemented, "Is B — b — Billium here?"

"Yassum — yassum, ladies," came the unctuous reply. "Poly Bony round hyer. Dat precious baby

playin' widdim. Come in Miz Harveys, dat chile right round under foot somewhares."

Ruth Harvey stepped through the gate. Amelia clung to it, limp, relaxed, from the letting go of the strain.

"Somebody telephoned to me," she gasped. "Mother Missouri —"

"You would n't let them go down to the river." Ruth Harvey put it with a sort of tremulous confidence as they penetrated the small, hard-trodden yard and saw no signs of Bill or Poly Bony. William clung to his mother's skirts and wept silently.

Aunt Candace cast from her, as though it had been a serpent, the half-wrung sheet she was twisting between her strong hands.

"I won't leave a patch o' hide on dat niggah big enough to covah a dime!" she panted as she galloped ponderously through the gate almost loosening Amelia's hold, and took her way toward the bank.

The two ladies turned mutely and ran after her, William clinging first to one flying skirt and then the other. Heads were poked out of windows, gates flung open, and other people — mostly black washerwomen — joined the chase without knowing what they followed.

On the muddy bank the crowd came to a halt. Out in the stream there rocked and swayed a leaky old boat with four small negro boys come already to blows over its management, and one very dirty but very happy white baby sitting aloft at the stern. Let it be remembered to the credit of Napoleon

Bonaparte that his small black fist clutched fast the short skirts as the baby twisted and turned to get full enjoyment out of his latest adventure.

"Oh, there 's Bill!" announced William.

"Billy! Billy! Billy!" screamed Amelia.

"Don't call him — oh, honey, don't call him! He 's mighty apt to jump in de water to git to you ef you does," warned Aunt Candace.

Just then the boys in the boat caught sight of the group on the bank.

"Mammy," wailed Poly Bony, "I could n't he'p it. He follered me. I could n't git erway from him."

"An' you ain't a-gwine git erway from me," groaned the black woman. "You wait till I git me a boat and come out dar. Is any of you drownded yit?"

William ran about under everybody's feet, and mopped his clean face with dirty knuckles, until he looked more a Bill than a William. The crowd drifted down the bank toward the Beecham place. A head was poked from the second-story of that mansion overlooking the river. A loud voice was praying.

"Visit not the sins of the fathers upon the children." Ruth Harvey vaguely heard the schismatic preacher's tones. Then she forgot everything in the sight of what was happening out there in the boat.

Crazed by the sound of that praying voice — every man jack of them thinking no doubt that he heard it in anticipation holding forth at his own funeral — the boys had finally come to blows. Andrew Jackson struck at Napoleon, overbalanced himself and fell

into the water with a whoop. The others flung themselves back to trim ship — and went headlong into the river from the other side.

"Set down!" wailed Poly Bony, as the resulting jar flung him, also, far into the current.

Released from where Poly Bony had held him, Bill crawled up on the stern seat and stared after his scout, guide and interpreter.

"Poly Bony," he called doubtfully, "Bill come too."

"You stay — whar' you is," panted the small black boy, striking out literally for life. He could not swim as well as his companions who were already nearing shore. "White folks — gwine — git you. Nobody but me — keer 'f I — drownd."

Bill watched with envy the four black heads bobbing in the water. What fun it looked!

"Go wiv Poly Bony," he repeated doggedly.

Flinging above his head short pink arms, he rolled manfully into the river.

A groan went up from those on shore. William stayed his tears to gaze with envious fascination. The negress ran, holding on to Ruth Harvey, suspecting her of meditating heaven knows what rashness. Her own eyes rolled, her breath sounded loud.

None of the others heard Amelia Harvey calling in a smothered voice, "William, oh, William!" But her offspring trotting at her side knew that it was not to himself the cry was addressed. He gazed in terror at her changed voice and face.

A moment the yellow head drifted on the ripples. In that instant Napoleon Bonaparte looked back and

saw the thing that had chanced. Boats were putting out from the opposite bank. They would be too late. His eyes swept back to the unwelcome charge. He turned and floundered toward the middle of the stream. Aunt Candace began to sob, great choking dry gasps of excitement rather than sorrow. Two black women up on the bank above her were shrieking and dragging down a heavy log wash-bench to launch it. Andrew Jackson had reached shallow water; he stood up and shook himself like a spaniel, then crouched, afraid to approach. Wash and Zack were swimming well, and had got almost to where they could wade. Suddenly the fair head went down and remained under.

"Oh, my Lawd! Oh, Lawd Jesus! I don' want ter live ef dat baby 's drownded. I hope my chile drownds too!" moaned Aunt Candace, her face a curious ashen gray.

But the black head rode the ripples, and now something white, with a top of drenched yellow appeared with it. Napoleon had caught the back of the baby's frock in his teeth dog fashion, and was paddling desperately toward the shore.

Into the water rushed the mothers, white and black.

"We 'se taller dan what Poly Bony is," choked the negress, "we 'll wade out far 's we kin to him."

"I can swim — a little," whispered Ruth — and never knew she had spoken. Swim! She could have flown to that bit of floating whiteness, so unconscious was she of her body or her own life.

Clinging together, they stumbled over the smooth,

water-washed stones of the bottom. The current swept about their knees — it was up to their waists; Ruth felt its cold lip-lip about her throat, when something wet and white was flung against her face as Poly Bony, with his last remnant of strength, cast the baby at his rescuers.

Beside herself with the rapture of relief, Aunt Candace clutched wildly at the recovered white baby, lifted him high in strong arms, and held him aloft, presenting pink heels and an astonished countenance to heaven.

"Glory! Glory!" she shouted in the hysteric accents of the revival, as she whirled and made toward the bank, threshing and churning the water, stepping high. Her son, drowning forgotten, cast a despairing look after her dripping blue calico back. But Mrs. Harvey laid hold upon the preserver of her baby, and, herself almost afloat, helped him to shallows where his feet touched bottom.

Up there in the window Mother Missouri was uttering fervent thanksgivings. Most of the women were in tears. Bill was dragged from one embrace to another with a noble absence of race prejudice. Then Aunt Amelia got him and kissed him in the ear, and talked buzzily.

"William," she said, "oh, William!"— just like that, though the foolish woman knew better. "I'll never grudge you the name again."

His vigorous kicking freed him from Aunt Amelia. He was on the ground, walking, holding to somebody's hand, and all the women were talking and some of

them crying at the same time. Then William miraculously appeared at his side. He had an impulse to say to his wrong-headed aunt, "Here 's William." But he did n't. He said something else that meant the same thing.

"I 'm Bill," he announced.

His cousin maintained the hold on his hand, and William and Bill trotted manfully on their short legs away from the River of Death and up the slope toward the City of their Future.

II

HIS LUNGS

ILL was seven and William was nine, when there came a year that put them in one house. Ruth Harvey caught a cold in what Aunt Candace called the blackberry winter of a Tennessee March. It hung on through the hot weather, and even her pluck had finally to give up when, in the fall, she was ordered to Florida. Amelia Harvey eagerly accepted the trust of her young nephew. Perhaps at the back of her head was the belief that her gentle influence would, before spring, make over the youngster into her idea of a proper William the Third. In point of fact she was exceedingly fond of Bill, his free and fearless good will counting high with her, while she found his precocious male dominance subduing.

"I shall so love to have him," she said. "It will be so sweet for the boys to be together a while — the two Williams."

"William and Bill," corrected her brother-in-law smilingly.

Mrs. Amelia was living with her late husband's father, at the rectory, Aunt Candace in the kitchen, Poly Bony doing chore work on the place. The Rector

would be away from Watauga longer than his son, the church having given him a trip to the Holy Land.

"But I shall get along beautifully," Amelia said with that perpetual smile some folks seem to feel necessary to put on for the sick or ailing. "I remember that you used not to mind your boy's playing with Poly Bony. I have him sleeping in the carriage-house now, while father 's away, though I 've generally kept him rather apart from William. What shall I do if the child gets sick?"

"Sick?" echoed James Harvey, "why the youngster never was sick a day in his life. He 's as tough as a pine knot. If you want to go to Wallace Kirk for medical advice, you 'll have to make an excuse of William — Bill does n't look the part."

Mrs. Amelia's lip drooped a bit, she found her brother-in-law's inference indelicate. Having mourned a Reverend William Harvey the Second, pictorially for nine years, it was annoying to have people remember the fact that she had been, as a seventeen-year-old, engaged to Dr. Wallace Kirk, then a medical student. Dr. Kirk, still a bachelor, had recently returned to Watauga to take over the practice of the Harveys' family physician, recently deceased. One must admit that for an Amelia Harvey the situation was trying.

The day after Bill's parents left, she bought a black and white polka-dot parasol, and walked past Dr. Wallace Kirk's office, holding the sunshade between herself and that building. Then she went home and cried.

Bill loved his mother better than anything else in the world just then. But when she was out of sight she was out of mind; one's forgetting faculty is in excellent working order at seven. And Aunt Amelia was delightful. He was too young to appreciate the coquetry of that attenuated mourning the widow was now wearing, and twenty years ripening would be needed on his part for the babyish appeal of her large, near-sighted blue eyes to land with Bill; but she let him have his way from the beginning, and the tough young limb, treated as though he had been a frail, tender shoot, half broken from the parent trunk, speedily toughened further and grew crooked. He ate in a way that would have deranged the digestion of an ostrich, kept hours that would have shamed an owl, and soon developed a coated tongue and a fitful temper.

By way of showing any one that had doubts on the subject how little she cared for Wallace Kirk and what her opinion of his medical skill was, Bill's aunt took her small charge, at this point, to a lady physician who had an office directly opposite Dr. Kirk's, explained that his mother had gone South for incipient tuberculosis and that she was extremely anxious to use extra caution with the child.

"I want to take the very best possible care of him," she told the serious-faced female in glasses, "because his own dear mother did n't — well she was everything that was loving, and all that; but she did n't worry over him as I do over my little boy. Some mothers don't, you know."

William and Bill sitting on either side of her

exchanged masonic glances across her black and white striped dimity. The severe lady indicated that a lack of worry on the part of the female parent might be an adequate reason for a high rate of infant mortality.

Mrs. Amelia began to be a good deal alarmed after she got into the doctor's office — most people do — and some folks think the alarm is well-grounded. She breathed short, and fixed supplicating eyes on the medical lady.

This person, to whom Bill had instantly conceived a dislike because her square bodice had a flat front, and her square boot-toes a certain flatness to match, took his temperature carefully, using a little glass cigarette for the purpose and making him hold it under his tongue. It got in the way of some chewing-gum he had there, for it is a rule of physics that two bodies can not occupy the same space at the same time. She laid her ear to the small thumping heart, a proceeding which struck Bill as indecently familiar. He lost his indignation in wondering whether she could read the secrets of that organ.

"All well, so far," she said. And yet her manner was not comforting.

Up to this time Bill had been feeling that if his lungs had anything to conceal, theirs was the right of concealment; no one should surprise the secrets of his inside if he could help it. Now he began to wish there might be something to astonish this calm doctor-lady. He held his breath and then let it out in small gasps as she prodded him with a stethoscope and brazenly harkened to him with magnifying things in her ears.

"Nothing the matter there, I think," she muttered as she put the instrument away.

The next thing had so hard a name that Bill could never remember it; but there was a hammer connected, and his flat chest was well gone over. This portion of the proceeding knocked down his throat the piece of chewing-gum that ought to have remained hidden under his tongue. To disguise the accident he began to cough stridently.

"Does he cough much like that?" asked the doctor, startled.

Bill coughed again with all the variations he could work in.

"It appears to me that the bronchial tubes are slightly inflamed," said the doctor. "I noticed from the first that there was considerable hoarseness."

The lady doctor had not been present while William and Bill and Poly Bony played "hollerer's day" with Ted Winsdale and Wash Barnes and Zack Elder over in a vacant lot behind the stable, trying valiantly to see which team could out-yell the other.

"Do you — do you think I ought to write to his parents?" inquired Mrs. Amelia tremulously.

"Not yet," said the doctor in a tone so ominous that it was worse than as though she had advised prompt notification. "I should get to work at once with a building-up treatment. He ought to sleep out of doors. Have n't you an upstairs porch where you can place a cot for him? He seems to me much emaciated." Bill, though as his father had said always a perfectly healthy little heathen, had none of

the suave plumpness that characterized William. "I think that 's all — milk, eggs, cod-liver oil, if you can get him to take it. Keep him pleased and happy, cheerful, in the open air as much as possible — and don't let him think about his condition."

It was a considerable order, and it leaned heavily to Bill's side of the ledger. Aunt Amelia paid a five dollar fee and left the office. She got the boys home, watching Bill every step of the way as though she expected to see him fall dead any moment.

This terrified concentration on her nephew continued all through supper and till bed-time. Have you noticed how a word — the most commonplace word on the page — will start out from among its fellows and look monstrously queer, if you center your attention on it? Bill, finally himself uneasy under his aunt's steady gaze, seemed curious enough.

"Aunt Amelia," he asked as though inspired, "what 's tuber-closes? Have I got 'em?"

"No — no — no, you poor little dear," Amelia exclaimed, coming from the table to put her arms around him. "You're not to think about such things. Auntie will take care of you. You shall have everything you want, and be perfectly happy in auntie's house."

"I want his train-a-cars," said Bill, more as an experiment than anything else.

"Yes — yes," agreed his aunt; "only be well." To William, mutely plucking at her sleeve, and reproaching her with his eyes, she whispered something of which Bill only caught at the words, "Poor little

cousin — let him have anything he wants — if he should die — you 'd be sorry."

The rectory was a big, old-fashioned, before-the-war, white-painted structure, with a pseudo-Greek entrance porch; its tall white wooden columns running up two stories and housing under the big roof a tiny balcony. This had come properly at the end of the hall, but for some reason a little room had been made of the wide hall-end, and given to William. The balcony, thus accessible by a door, but scarcely larger than a big bed, and reminding Bill inevitably of the tiny fenced squares around old graves in country graveyards, Mrs. Amelia proposed to utilize for his out-door sleeping.

The subsequent history of this matter is obscure. Aunt Candace, who did not believe in "throwin' chillun out doors at nights," could have told a tale of both pillows on William's bed being dented and Bill's Spartan couch unmarred; but she regularly shook up the little white cot on the balcony, even though it looked when she came to it like a small snow-covered grave, immaculate with its sheets tucked in at the sides. Candace had always done her best to spoil Bill. William's weak criticisms and resistance held the ultimate essence of praise. "Huh," Bill boasted to his cousin, "you ain't got any tuber-closes." And William, sad, admiring, wistfully admitted the personal deficiency. Aunt Amelia was utterly unable to deny him anything now. With the knowledge that an imitation pain, a faked cough, would procure him any privilege, Bill emerged from the enterprising brat

into the little monster class. His deterioration was as rapid as the boy himself was active and enterprising. He had altered his moral standard in quick response to the different — and false — attitude of those about him. He levied blackmail without shame, on the score of his mother's ill-health and his own failing constitution. William's life became that of a scared rabbit, hustling from one cherished possession to another, certain that Bill had but to thrust his grimy knuckles into his eyes and fly distress-signals when a perverted mother would bestow any treasure upon him. The alien continued to eat like a cormorant — but fitfully. His color was bad, his eye bilious. Amelia Harvey finally decided that she must take him to another doctor. To this end she dressed both boys in what Bill called crackly clothes. When Aunt Candace used to wash for his mother, a woman who believed that things could be too stiff for comfort, she never was allowed to put the buzz-saw edge on white blouse collars, the rattling tin-pan effect into baggy white trousers that now afflicted Bill.

" We 'll break 'em when we sit down," he announced to William as the pair walked, side by side, ahead of Aunt Amelia.

" Mother says the stiffening makes them keep clean longer," dutiful William communicated.

Bill, who took nothing for granted, had a sudden inspiration, and preferred to drop behind his aunt for the working out of it. He secured some dirt from the sidewalk and was interested to perceive that it left

a brown streak on his blouse exactly as it did on those less starched which his mother provided.

Still resolute not to consult Dr. Kirk, Mrs. Amelia found a doctor, more unsatisfactory than the lady physician. Even her eager gullibility could see that the old fellow got hopelessly entangled in the identical names of the two boys before him and was half the time examining and reporting on William. She paid the fee, but did not go back. She began to ask everybody's advice. The opinions given were conflicting but none of them cheering. Bill heard them, and William stowed them away in a youthful if somewhat inactive mind. Aunt Candace occasionally rebelled and spoke of "a little hickory tea" or "extract of dry-shingle" for the correction of Bill's trouble. She was sternly reproved. Mrs. Amelia was getting hypnotized on the idea. Bill had but to allude to the "lungs of his insides" to subdue her. Every time he coughed — and he coughed now whenever he wanted anything — she saw the swift progress of a galloping consumption, the little white hearse at her door, the return of his parents — and nothing to show them but a grave. In fact her eyes were too big and soft, her heart too much perturbed by the proximity of Dr. Wallace Kirk who had the impudence to ride past the house nearly every day on a tall brown horse, going to call on patients, to be any fair match for energetic Bill. Amelia had spoken to her old suitor once, with a very distant air which reminded him that their engagement broke in a quarrel. She was as wax in

Bill's hands during the melancholy that ensued upon this meeting.

Nobody ever attempted to discipline Bill any more except — and that secretly — Aunt Candace. Poly Bony kept him in fair order so far as their personal relations were concerned; but Poly Bony profited too much by Bill's new privileges to make any objection to them. One morning the negro woman spoke out. The widow was sitting downstairs at the front window with a bit of sewing. It was within an hour of the time when Dr. Kirk might be expected to make his rounds.

"Miss 'Melia — oh, Miss 'Melia," sounded the big, mellow tones from up-stairs, "Bill 'clar's he ain't gwine to be slopped up wid no water. I cain' do nothin' widdim. He won' take no baff."

"Oh, yes, I 'm sure he will, Aunt Candace," Mrs. Amelia said, loath to forsake her window. "I promised him a whole quarter's worth of roller-coaster tickets. He said he 'd sit under the shower two minutes by the clock."

"I did! I am," shrilled a keen falsetto from the bathroom, the sound piercing above the splashing of intimate waters.

"Yassum — dat he is," grumbled Aunt Candace, lumbering ponderously down to the first landing. "Miss 'Melia dat chile settin' in de baff-tub, un'neaf the shower baff. Yassum — he 's settin' dar a-holdin' up yo' spottified pa'sol!"

"What?"

The dismayed little woman sprang up the stairs,

squeezed herself past Candace's ample person, and as the bath-room door was ajar, beheld the truth.

There sat Bill, a grimy nude, crouched on slim ankles under a raised sun-umbrella that flung off the drops of the descending shower fountain-fashion. And he was prepared to defend the situation.

"You said sit under the shower, auntie," he declared. "I 'm a-sittin' under it. Don't you see me?"

Floor and wall were liberally splashed while the creature crassly in need of a cleansing maintained, with the exception of two spindling ankles and a fair allowance of foundation, that dryness which is applauded in prohibition towns. Mrs. Amelia approached, she looked at the white parasol, obviously a widow's vanity, its great black polka dots weeping down the breadths as though in half-hearted confession that the whole structure came from a bargain counter. Life was hard. She had the inconsequent feminine desire for somebody stronger to take care of her. She swallowed a rising sob.

"Look at dat mess," harangued old Candace from the hallway. "Who gwine obstituquate dey j'ints scrubbin' up dat flo'? Miss 'Melia, de time hab come — ef you don't make Bill put down dat spottified pa'sol dis minute, I 's 'bleeged to raise my hand on him!"

"Oh, don't — Aunt Candace," remonstrated the mistress. "Remember his poor mother. Think of his own health. I 'll get it. Don't be harsh with him."

She picked her way through the flood, dodging the

drops in futile fashion, and turned off the shower at its source.

"Na — aow!" screamed the bather. "It ain't two minutes yet. If you go and turn it off that way, I 'll have my roller-coaster tickets anyhow."

"Yes, yes," agreed the defeated aunt, lowering her ruined parasol and regarding it with trembling lip. "You did n't mean to spoil auntie's sun-umbrella, did you, darling?"

Bill made no direct reply to this, which William would have recognized as an opportunity for offering sympathetic incense that would later bear fruit in privileges. Bill knew a shorter way.

"Oh, goody," he jubilated, hopping over the edge of the tub and whisking a towel around him as he followed into her bedroom. "Gimme the tickets right now — as soon as I got a pocket to put 'em in."

William was in his mother's room, patiently laboring to set together a puzzle, one piece of which Bill had secreted. He gathered the bright fragments together and covered them with both hands, under the delusion that his toy was still intact, that he yet had something to lose to the spoiler.

"Yes — yes, I will, dear," agreed Mrs. Amelia. "Come and let auntie help you dress, as soon as you get dry. Bring us a towel with one corner wet, Candace."

"I don't like a scratchy towel," whined Bill. "I did n't get much wet. I 'm about dry now," he congratulated himself, surveying his meager person painstakingly. "Don't you wet any old towel for me,

Aunt Candace," the whine rose to a sharply protesting yelp. "I 'm ketchin' cold." He attempted a sneeze, not very successfully. Sneezes are not so easily simulated as coughs.

"I love my bath," remarked William virtuously. And even his mother was displeased.

In the reaction it produced she permitted Bill to drag on a freshly laundered suit over his damp and mottled hide. His thin neck stuck up plaintively through the stiff, thick sailor collar. She smoothed the edges, with tender, tremulous fingers and turned to her bureau for the roller-coaster tickets.

"Do you feel a little better, dear?" she asked.

"I don't like to ride on the roller-coaster," William asserted, having failed dismally with his first offering. "The motion makes me sick."

"De Lawd knows," snorted old Candace as she tempestuously picked up and cleaned after this toilet, "de Lawd himself do know dat sech chillen ort to 'a' been bawn my color, so 's de dirt would n't show on 'em."

"Candace — don't hurt his feelings," returned her mistress, bringing forth a comb and brush and making overtures for the completion of Bill's toilet.

He fought the comb like a tiger and made indifferent friends with the brush, while William looking on smoothed already shining yellow locks with a nervous hand.

"Did you want to go out with your cousin?" asked Mrs. Amelia when a mangled result was achieved.

"I don't want him," said Bill scowling. "He 's always in the way."

"I don't want to go," ejaculated William almost simultaneously.

These two who had always longed to be together were suffering, like many a honey-moon couple, from the results of too much propinquity. Bill went grandly through the front door and strode down the street, with his dirty hands in his clean pockets, a conqueror — in search of more worlds. But worlds — worlds worth subduing, anyhow — seemed to be all in-doors or running errands for their mothers this morning; the only samples of juvenilia to come down the street were the tall thin boy and little dancing girl that belonged to Mother Missouri Starr. For a time Bill ignored them. Then his greatness pained him, and he shouted across the street.

"You dass n't come on this side."

"I do dast, too," sounded a rather puzzled, tremulous response from the boy.

Bill stooped to load his arms with stones. He hoped the little girl would go on. He felt the need of combat. His brown fists clenched to knuckle whiteness over the primitive ammunition.

"Come on then," he gibed. "Come on if you dast!"

The tall boy made a half-hearted attempt, but his little sister pulled on his hand and he beat an ignominious retreat down the way, pebbles swishing guardedly in his rear. Bill stood, his brow set in a complacent frown, the consciousness of the roller-coaster tickets in his pocket making of him a king.

"You dass n't come across now," he challenged, as

he overtook the pair at the foot of the hill. The boy had put his little sister from him. She was silently rubbing a pink spot on her bare foot.

"I 'm a-comin'," said the boy. "You hit my little sister with one o' them rocks."

The speech sounded ominous. Again Bill filled his arms with stones.

"Come on then," he shrilled.

The tall thin boy studied him — and stood right in front of the big plate-glass window of Dr. Wallace Kirk's office to do it.

"You did n't hurt my foot much," put in the little girl pacifically. She laughed and showed the absence of a front tooth. In spite of her dental defects her smile was adorable.

"I 'm comin'," repeated her brother. Yet he continued to stand exasperatingly still.

"I dare you — dare you — dare you! Double-dog dare you!"

Bill forgot the window back of the boy — let us hope the boy had never remembered it — and heaved a sizable stone in an unskilful fist. Then — was the air to blame, as in that matter of Hyacinthus and the quoit, some thousands of years ago? Or had the boy been mean enough to look taller than he really was? The missile went over his head. It went through the great square window of the doctor's office!

There was a scurrying. The tall thin boy was not there. His little sister also seemed to have vanished. The front door of the doctor's office opened, showing a trim hall-way with waiting patients. A man

ten feet tall and fiercely bearded came down the steps and set a hand of iron upon Bill's shoulder.

"Did you throw that stone, my son?" came the query, more dreadful for its hateful silkiness of expression.

Bill's vision cleared, he began to realize that the doctor was only of the average height, that his whiskers were perfectly normal. The fingers of his left hand were between the pages of a book. It crossed Bill's mind that he could hit the knuckles of that hand and double the doctor up. But he restrained himself. The new-comer looked as though he were quite capable of coming undoubled and doing things to people. Bill tried to drop his stones unostentatiously as he mumbled, "Yessir."

"What 's your name?" inquired the doctor, giving him a gentle shake as though to jar his idea into action.

"Bill Harvey," with impudent intonation.

Dr. Kirk began to look interested.

"Where do you live?"

Bill's freckled nose sniffed disdainfully at the catechism, yet he vouchsafed:

"Right up on the hill there in the big house with the fat posts to its porch."

"Well, young man," pursued the doctor with much civility, "I 'm going to see your mother about this broken window."

"Huh! You 'll have to go a long ways if you do," jeered Bill. "My mother 's in Florida with my father, 'cause she 's got tuber-closes, an' maybe she 's going to die of 'em. I 've got 'em, too."

"You have?" echoed the doctor unmoved. "That's fine — tuberculosis. I am going up to talk to your Aunt Amelia, then."

Bill paused an instant to reflect that he had not mentioned any Aunt Amelia in his scheme of life.

"You'll wish you had n't," he returned, hopping up and down, casually disposing of the last of his ammunition on a stray cur that attempted the street crossing at that moment. "My Aunt Amelia said you — you could n't doctor a sick cat for her."

For a moment the doctor surveyed his prisoner with a face inscrutable.

"We'll see about that, too, my friend," he announced finally, tightening his grip on Bill's shoulder and moving him with great briskness toward the office steps.

"I don't wanna go in there," Bill announced sullenly. "Aunt 'Melia would n't let me."

For a moment Dr. Kirk looked as angry as he felt, and the spectacle of a grown man's righteous rage had a good effect on Bill.

"Maybe I can't doctor sick cats but I'm a pretty fair hand with sick boys," the doctor remarked as they took the steps at a good clip. "I'm going to carry you right into my office now and investigate your tuberculosis."

That relieved Bill's mind. The tuber-closes had never failed to subdue. He went along most willingly. Already he considered the doctor a conquered province and secretly nourished anticipations of tribute.

"I guess you never saw a boy no older 'n me with

as many tuber-closes as I 've got," he remarked as he thrust out an extremely impudent tongue in a manner that passed for an office courtesy. "I 'll bet you 'll be s'prised when you 'xamine me. They 're all s'prised — and Aunt Amelia makes William give me anything I ask for."

"William — I thought you said your name was William — or Bill," said the doctor getting down his stethoscope and setting it in place.

"There 's two of us," the victim of tuber-closes announced, "William Harvey an' Bill Harvey. What you laughin' about?" as the doctor smiled. "Ain't I got as many tuber-closes as any boy of my size you ever saw?"

"Two of you — are there?" said the doctor with what Bill found very unsatisfactory briefness. He had abandoned the stethoscope now and was thumping and prodding with blunt fingers which somehow found a vital spot with every poke.

"My Aunt Amelia has tookened me to more 'n forty doctors," Bill announced, "an' they all say they wisht-they-may-die if they ever saw anything like my tuber-closes! She won't scold me 'bout breakin' your old window — see if she does, but she 'll give you what for. Did n't I have lots o' tuber-closes?"

"Oh — your tuber-closes," remarked the doctor, coming abruptly from a brown study and regarding the small boy squirming in his hands. He put up the instruments with a sudden air of purpose and glanced at the clock. His office hours were nearly over.

"William," he said; then in response to a horrified grunt, "Bill, then; I 'll come up and see your aunt by and by. You tell her I 'm coming."

"I won't," ejaculated Bill, as he twisted loose and fled.

He was playing on the street with a little red wagon, William looking on timidly; he had coasted the hill twice; then, on the third trip, finding the game slow without accidents, contrived to overturn himself in the cart directly in front of his grandfather's gate. Somebody was getting off a tall brown horse at that gate — really Bill would have done better to run into the horse's legs — but the rider jumped down and came to the child's assistance.

Screeching like a lost soul on the broiler, Bill got limberly to his feet, flung an opportune rock at the Good Samaritan's horse, and, as it bolted, yelled into its owner's face:

"Did y' ever get left? Yah — yah! Did y' ever get left?"

He was at his worst at that moment, was Bill, and logically his hour had struck. Once more a hand descended upon his shoulder and closed in a grasp that did not pinch or dig — but held. He gazed up into Dr. Kirk's face. He had not before observed upon whom he was making war.

"I said I was coming to see your aunt, but I did n't know I should have the pleasure of meeting you so soon again," said the new-comer pleasantly. "And William, too — that 's William up there on the porch, is n't it?"

He was assisting Bill toward the house rapidly as he spoke. The urchin glanced backward.

"Oh, you need n't look after my horse," the doctor said. "He 'll stop when he gets to the office door. Things around me are trained to mind — horses and boys, and all."

The tone was crisp and confident. It sent little thrills over Bill that were not entirely of terror or distaste. William rose and came toward them as though his name had been called.

"So this is your Aunt Amelia's son," said Dr. Kirk in a voice neither of the boys quite understood. "Well, William — would you like to ride a horse? I 'll let you ride mine sometimes if you can learn to be careful. You might have ridden him now, if your cousin had n't let go of a rock by mistake and sent him off."

William looked at Bill with disfavor.

"I don't wanna go in the house. I wanna play with my wagon some more," remarked Bill.

Dr. Kirk shook his head.

"You just think you do," he smiled.

And then both boys forgot their personal affairs for the moment as Mrs. Amelia appeared in the front door and they saw the new look in her face, and heard the new sound of her voice.

"Oh, Wallace," she cried, and got suddenly pink and seemed almost like a girl. Her lips smiled tremulously. There were tears in her eyes. She had forgotten both William and Bill. She was seventeen years old, with her lover coming up the walk.

"Amy," said the doctor — Bill had a sudden instinct that he might pull loose and run now, but something in the man's tone held him curiously —"I might never have found courage to get up the hill to find you if it had n't been for this blessed boy. He broke a window of my office this morning. In the subsequent arbitration he talked to me about something that he called tuber-closes, and your not thinking me fit to doctor a sick cat. If that 's so, maybe you won't give much weight to my word; but I wanted to come and set your mind at rest on the subject if I could."

"I never said such a thing," said Mrs. Amelia indignantly.

William rolled troubled eyes on a mother who told, not nice ladylike tarra-diddles, but whoppers like that. But Bill, liking her the better, pulled loose and rubbed against her, butting a bullet head under her arm.

"Then you 'll take my word about the tuberculosis," said the doctor.

"Tuberculosis," echoed Mrs. Amelia, all the reflection of girlish rapture going suddenly out of her face. "Oh, Wallace — is it serious?"

"Pretty serious, Amy," said the doctor, with a firm lip, but his eyes twinkled. "Here — you two boys take that wagon around the house and play with it decently. Don't make the streets unsafe for pedestrians. I 've got something to say to your mama and your auntie that does n't need you around."

Bill scowled and shook a lowered head in negative, but William was already running obediently for the red wagon. It was time to defend at least a portion

of his rights. The doctor reached out and caught Bill as he passed.

"We may as well dispose of this matter before we send the youngster away. How many people have been telling you that the child has tuberculosis?"

"Oh, all of them I took him to lately, Wallace," Aunt Amelia said, and Bill's hopes of immediate reinstatement in his position of tyrant flared high. "Is n't it terrible? They all agree there 's something the matter with him. He has such an irregular, strange appetite — and yet, Wallace, he keeps going all the time just like a machine, and he gets thinner and thinner. I never had any such trouble with William. I don't know what to do."

The doctor's smile had been growing throughout this recital. Now he threw back his head and laughed joyously.

"Keeps going — I 'll wager he does — and keeps you and William moving, too, eh, Amy? Oh, you poor little, dear little girl!"

Aunt Amelia evidently forgave this outrageous speech because of the silly compliments to herself which it contained. Bill had his opinion of a man who would call an old lady like that a little girl.

What she said was,

"You 're such a comfort, Wallace. Oh, if I 'd only gone to you before!"

"From what I can learn the young man has led you a pretty strenuous life since you discovered the precarious condition of his health," the doctor pursued.

Then Bill found how unstable is the favor of mem-

bers of one's household. The story of his past atrocities, capped by this morning's bath-hour performance, came tumbling out, Aunt Amelia disclosing, William returning from the gate dragging the red wagon after him and putting in a sanctimonious word, Aunt Candace edging through the hall from the kitchen to supply incredible details. Nobody was lacking but Poly Bony, and he finally came and peered around the corner of the house and chuckled. Dr. Kirk's expression was a little grim when the catalogue was complete. Bill, watching with an instant apprehension that this was an adversary to be reckoned with, felt himself in straits. He put his arms around Aunt Amelia's waist and hid his face in her lap.

"But nobody could harbor ill-will against a poor little child who is dud-dud-doomed," gulped Aunt Amelia suddenly returning to his banner, as she made an end of accusation. "The most pitiful thing in the world, I do think, is a little child in such danger. There, darling — auntie knows. Auntie 'll take care of you!"

Candace snorted. William dropped the tongue of the red wagon and stood at attention. Poly Bony came a few steps into the front yard.

"Well, I took the young man into my office, and made as thorough an examination of him as though he 'd been an invalid millionaire, ready to pay me a twenty-five thousand dollar fee," announced the doctor smilingly.

"Oh, did you, Wallace — did you?" cried the widow, with an outright sob of relief. "That was

dear of you. I have so longed for your advice; but now I am afraid to listen if —"

"You need n't be," the doctor interrupted, laughing. "I found Bill as sound as a roach, so far as his lungs are concerned — not a vestige of pulmonary weakness, even. His stomach 's out of order. You 've been letting him eat all sorts of stuff, I imagine. A little discipline is what Bill and his stomach both need," he concluded succinctly.

"Has n't he tuberculosis?" breathed Aunt Amelia.

"Ain't I got any tuber-closes?" demanded Bill.

"Ain't he got dem ar?" sounded Aunt Candace from the hallway.

"Is n't there anything the matter of him?" inquired William hopefully. A physically sound Bill would be tolerable after this torturing invalid.

"Have n't I got any tuber-closes at all?" repeated Bill incredulously.

"You have n't got one," the doctor said cruelly. "You 're perfectly sound and whole. What you need is — discipline."

"Hickory tea — extract o' dry-shingle," muttered Aunt Candace in the background.

A wriggle of sullen despair pulled Bill from the doctor's grasp and carried him on to the tongue of the red wagon, which he grasped and dragged mechanically around in the direction the doctor had indicated. William followed. Poly Bony dropped back to join them. Aunt Candace went on to her concerns in the kitchen.

It was a pleasant October afternoon; life seemed to

have some gleams of joy in it after Bill had given William to understand that even if he lacked tuber-closes, the red wagon still belonged to the Harvey boy of the shortened name. Poly Bony devised a fairly dangerous scheme whereby the four-wheeled affair could be used as a coaster and sent rapidly down a couple of boards leaned in the coach-house window. After all, tuber-closes were n't everything. Even when his aunt called them both in to be washed up, since Dr. Kirk was going to stay for tea, it failed to entirely darken Bill's horizon. He found somewhere composure to face the situation, when the doctor remarked at the table:

"Go light on the honey for Bill, Amy. You've been letting him have too many sweets. I notice you're very careful of William's diet — too careful, maybe. Even the thing up a bit, dear girl, try to develop the Bill-ness of William and bring out the William-ness of Bill."

III

HIS CHIVALRY

THE balance of Bill's stay with his Aunt Amelia was salutary. Dr. Wallace Kirk took to spending most of his evenings at the rectory; he assumed airs of authority. Aunt Amelia submitted matters to his judgment in a way that disgusted both William and Bill with women. More out-door exercise and hardship was enjoined and enforced for William. Bill was put on a regimen that speedily brought him back to his usual hard-as-nails condition. Yet he liked his Uncle Doctor, as he was encouraged to call the new man.

His Aunt Amelia delayed her marriage until the return of Ruth Harvey. Bill's mother came back from Florida, looking like a sixteen-year-old. Now if the doctor had said that about "dear little girl" to her, or shown a disposition to hang around evenings and hold her hand there might have been some excuse — but then —! The Rector was home again and married the pair in the shabby old church of St. Jude's, where William and Bill were both to be choir boys next year, if Bill could dig up a singing voice. The cousins, wearing inconceivably gorgeous apparel, looked owlishly at the few other children who came

to the reception in a similar abnormality of garb, hypnotized by the grandeur of the occasion, and the knowledge of those abundant refreshments which the negroes were restlessly shifting about in the dining-room.

And after that, Aunt Amelia and William went to live in a house considerably further from the Harvey place than the rectory was, and William continued studious and good in spite of what Bill thought were his stepfather's efforts to have him become a real boy. Aunt Candace stayed on, keeping house for the Rector. Poly Bony was supposed to live with kin-folks down at Soapsuds Alley, but he made his regular rounds of the rectory and the Harvey place as he had been used to do at an earlier period.

William the First developed a mighty interest in a chapel which St. Jude's wanted to build over beyond the bluffs towards the flat-woods, where a little suburb was springing up. Lacking an edifice of their own, they used the schoolhouse, and William and Bill were always expected to go to Sunday school in that place when their grandfather conducted services.

The hot dust rose in small puffs where one set down a foot. It hung, turning to gold in the glowing air of a Sabbath morning; it spread whitely upon the weeds by the wayside, as ten-year-old Bill, uncomfortably starched, in Sunday trim, crept, at a snail's pace toward that little white schoolhouse on the hill. His grandfather had gone on ahead, attended by sedate William who carried the bag of vestments. Bill mended his pace with a sigh. What folly to go in-

doors and say over words at a time like this when all nature shouted to you to come out and go bird-nesting.

Suddenly he dropped down in a fence corner with a chuckle. A grotesque procession, one behind the other, came trudging along the lane. Men and women and children alike wore long black calico "robes"—to Bill they looked mere skimpy sacks into which bones had been poured, with hooks at the top for a head apiece. Mother Missouri led, her dark, flowing hair silvered as though the frozen snow clung there. The sun searched out the naked white feet which rather startlingly terminated the narrow hem of her black skirt. Bill, looking, crumpled envious toes inside his Sunday shoes. Behind her followed two children, part of the time hand in hand, the only members of the procession who did not walk Indian file. One of these was a boy if the observer might guess from his short hair parted on one side; the shapeless black calico bag unsexed him and evidently dejected him much. This child held the pace of dogged misery, trotting hard to keep up with the woman directly ahead of him. Bill regarded his sorrow with calm, if not with satisfaction. A Sunday rig like that was worse than starch and shoe polish. By some moral jugglery it seemed that the tall boy was now paying for his evasion of a properly flung stone, whereby Uncle Doc's window got broken. But the little girl, similarly clad, was prettier than ever. Her front tooth had grown in all right; she displayed it in smiles, in the midst of that unsmiling band.

Bill had often seen the baiting of the Mother Mis-

sourians on their way to worship; indeed he had occasionally taken a hand. When they should pass the decorous youth of the town on his orthodox Sunday schoolward way there would be something worth hearing. He hung after the strange procession, with the interest he would have given to a dog fight in the making. As he had anticipated, when the file came abreast of the school-yard, into whose gate smug boys and girls were turning, they encountered here and there giggles, whispers, the ingenious distortion of small faces. He saw his grandfather in the schoolhouse entrance, closely accompanied by William, the perfect. He observed the worthy gentleman when he caught sight of Mother Missouri, saw his start of distaste, and that he turned away, William lingering a moment but finally closing the door.

Surely the closing of that door could have been in no manner a signal, yet it told the children that they were no longer under surveillance; and the decorous quiet was immediately broken by a shrill, derisive cry. They took it up all along the line, the childish voices, a thin, taunting chant.

Mother Mis-souri's buz-zards!
Mother Mis-souri's buz-zards!

The poor silly words were delivered with vindictive unction, which any of us who as a child bore a name, wore a garment, or followed a custom out of the common, may bear in smarting memory. At the first loud insult, Mother Missouri raised her glance with a start and looked her persecutors over; you won-

dered at the eyes and brow. It was an unusual countenance, lit like a lamp with self-forgetfulness, a very fury of zeal, a credulity archaic. Yet, bare-headed, bare-foot, Mother Missouri carried a look of race, of pride and distinction, and it had descended to the grandchildren who followed her. Her lips parted as though she would have spoken, but after the first flush of anger at the cruel gibe she apparently remembered the day and the errand, looked about on her followers, dropped her head and made as if to move on.

"Come, Alan," she said to the boy; "come, Lynette, take grandmother's hand." And she reached back to lead them.

A stone whizzed past and caught her outstretched fingers. It made a long, ragged scratch, and blood ran. The boys inside the gate fled toward the house as a school of minnows vanishes up-stream at the shadow of a bird upon the water.

She had not preached the doctrine of non-resistance in vain, this uncouthly garbed fanatic; not one among her followers raised a hand or voice in her defense. The wan, characterless faces exchanged looks as she wrapped the bleeding member in her handkerchief. Derelicts, these, wives and grandfathers of drunkard and tramp; cripples, the indolent, the senile, the epileptic — a handful of humanity, letter perfect in surface humility, they trudged forward, their eyes on the ground, or sliding furtively toward their discredited leader, with her wounded hand in its bloody cloth.

Bill lingered in the yard to watch the forlorn little

procession till it reached the Flat Woods, and the members of it knelt on the ground. The door of the Sunday school opened; some of the boys came back to the gate and stood with him. William was among them.

"Say," Bill addressed that young gentleman, "did you bring your aggies?"

William flushed painfully, his mind divided between allegiance to a grandfather of immaculate reputation and a cousin of fascinating superiority to recognized conventions. He knew, or should have known, that to bargain on Sunday was not a St. Judicious act, but Bill — Bill — the red-brown eyes and square jaw held his own gaze till he was in a manner hypnotized. He sheepishly drew from his Sunday trousers' pocket — Oh, that they should have been there! — a handful of beautiful agates.

"Huh!" sniffed the politic Bill, pawing them with a stubbed forefinger, "is that all you got? I thought y' had some good ones. I would n't be caught dead with that 'n on me. These ain't so bad. What 'll you take for the lot?"

A half dozen late comers attracted by the trade lingered to assist. There was a fascination in seeing Bill open five good blades from the handle of a two-bladed knife. It was like watching an excellent slight-of-hand performance — you know you are being fooled, yet you rather like it. His swift deftness amazed and finally half convinced even the most skeptical. William, though he had handled the same knife many a time, could not trust his own memory.

His large blue eyes grew quite round and almost meaningless, as he strove to be sure.

It lacked ten minutes of the hour and the boys drifted down the road, bantering, bargaining, unobservant of a small figure that stole through the undergrowth toward them. The child called Lynette had slipped away during her grandmother's opening prayer and come back. She had run breathlessly, revolving in her heart adequate reproof for taunt and missile that had been flung at her and hers. Bill got sight of her first, and retreated down the fence-row.

As the child came into the road she halted more than once, expecting to be hailed; but, instead, boyish backs were turned upon her, heads bent closer together, tones lowered; she was ignored. This hurt as no uttered affront could have done.

William, the color burning behind his ears, shuffled uneasily. "We 'd better go in," he reminded Bill, "grandpa will be expecting—"

"Aw, hold on," Bill coaxed, "I can't open this sixth blade—"

"Lemme try," William was hoodwinked enough to experience the human desire when blade sticks or box cover is obstinate; his fingers itched to display their skill.

"You can't have the knife till the bargain 's struck," insisted the financier, putting his goods behind him. "Honest Injun now, no going back. Cross-your-heart, you won't tell your mother."

William's absurdly clean right hand grabbed his coat

wildly in search of a heart to swear upon. He was offering the agates with his left.

"All right," Bill muttered, knife between teeth while he took and carefully deposited in his bank — a particular pocket — the coveted marbles. With a grin and a bow, he turned over the "six-blader."

It lay in William's palm a moment, all the boys looking on with a curious air of desiring to see the fraud prevail — it had been so ably played. Even William seemed reluctant to discover that the knife he had traded for was the same old two-bladed affair Bill had been carrying these many months. His color shifted. He looked as though he wanted to cry. On the tense moment came the shrill interruption of the little girl's accusation, a pitiful small challenge sent out in a quavering treble, the small challenger standing forlornly in the middle of the dusty way.

"You boys hurt my grandmother's hand dreadful bad."

William and Bill turned with relief to the interruption; one as unwilling to overcome as the other was to be vanquished.

"Here's one of the buzzards come back," cried William, showing that he was a human boy after all.

"Hello, buzzard," jeered another, flapping his arms in imitation of wings, grinning cheerfully at the newcomer.

They were all about to withdraw in the direction of the Sunday school when William flung over his shoulder, "Grandpa'll attend to you, Bill."

It was almost as though the threat had been intended for a warning. Bill stopped short.

"He 'll attend to you, too," came the thoughtful response, "trading on Sunday."

William walked rapidly on. He left the onus of the matter where such burdens usually rested — with Bill. Bill glanced at the schoolhouse, looked away down the road and sauntered back past the child. It was better to be punished for staying out of Sunday school than to have the matter of that trade brought before the Rector. The little girl in the road saw him go with despair. She shook all through her meager frame with terror yet she spoke again.

"We are n't buzzards. If my grandmother heard you call us that she 'd say you were liars."

She was following Bill. Somehow, in spite of the humiliating attitude of the others, he looked kind to her childish eyes. The little splinter of womanhood was on the verge of vehement tears — a demonstration of which she would be mightily ashamed. He glanced around at her.

"All liars have their part in the lake that burneth with hell fire," she breathed, in a poor little voice that made the words sound queer.

Bill turned, and she was delighted to find that he did not look angry. She straightened her thin shoulders under the hideous black gown and shook back the mass of her dark hair.

"See here," said Bill seriously, borrowing something from his grandfather's manner, "girls must n't say hell fire."

"It's in the Bible. My grandmother says it when she preaches. I guess all preachers do."

"Aw, Mother Missouri ain't a real preacher," ejaculated Bill, influenced by a lurking sense of pity to set her right on a few things. "My grandfather says she's just a fanatic."

Boy and girl confronted each other with a long, unflinching look. Wide fields of yellow wheat, a silver gray stream, and the green of woods drew an arcadian circle about the two, where a path-trailed hill led up to the little schoolhouse, closed now on the murmuring voices of children gone in to Sunday school. Far-off bells were sinking to silence. Down the way Lynette had come distant glimpses could be had of the Mother Missouri congregation kneeling under the trees in the Flat Woods. The two regarded each other with interest, with curiosity. The boy knew that people who were so underbred in their way of well-doing were all wrong. The girl knew only what she had heard from the old visionary preacher down there in the grove — a fiery conviction that the world outside of that little band was hastening to destruction.

Suddenly, "What's a fan-a-tic?" she demanded of the boy.

It was a cruel blow and discouraged his philanthropic attitude. Of what avail altruism when the object to be improved uses such unfair chain-shot? He took off his Sunday cap. His hair lay damp on his brow. He sat down suddenly in the weeds of a fence corner.

"It 's — it 's," he began in his grandfather's manner; then floundering back to naturalness, "Dogged 'f I know."

"My grandmother's church are the only people in all the world that are good," asserted the girl. "All other men"— she was plainly quoting —"belong to the devil — or, anyhow, the devil is their master."

"He ain't my master," asserted Bill, assuming with masculine egotism that when she mentioned men she included himself, and rolling over on his stomach in comfortable, genial unbending, "He 's scared of folks that go to my grandpa's church — or anyhow he 'd be scared of my grandpa."

"Scared — the devil? That shows how much you know. He ain't a man all off by himself, to be scared of things — he 's a — a kind of floating spirit. He gets inside of people that have bad thoughts. I feel him in me when I 'm mad."

She struck the scanty front of her black frock where it stretched over her flat breast. The minister's grandson wriggled closer and stared at a small girl who felt the devil in her. Perhaps there came down to him with the name a desire to investigate such cases.

"Sunday school 's taken up," he remarked as a thin strain of melody, "Onward, Christian Soldiers" on the tide of two score childish voices, reinforced by a wheezy old cottage organ, sounded out to them, sweetly tempered by distance, "I 'll — I 'll take you in and grandpa 'll talk to you, if you like." He made so much formal attempt at proselyting.

Her elfin face looked wistful enough. "I don't

really suppose I ought to sit with the scorners," she debated, using the phraseology to which she was accustomed. She dropped down beside him, crossing her slim ankles and pulling her scanty skirts over her bare, dusty feet, wondering, as many another puritan had wondered before her, and many will after, why the ungodly should be gifted with such winning ways. "You threw a rock at me that time," she said without rancor.

He knew she alluded to the day his Uncle Doc's window was broken.

"It did n't hurt you much," he excused, "and I could of — just as easy. Do you live with — Mrs. Mother Missouri?"

She nodded her head until the unribboned hair completely covered her face and breast, then with a shake threw all the dark mass backward.

"My father and mother are dead," she explained in the expressionless voice childhood gives to life's big tragedies. "They left me with grandmother and went on a ship, and — the boat went down and — they were drowned. Grandmother says it was because my mother braided her hair and my father would shave most every day. Grandmother says if we don't shave or braid our hair, and if we go barefooted we 'll never die. Are your parents dead?"

Evidently she had hoped she might find a kinship in their lots here for she sighed a little when he answered:

"Nope. That day I saw you an' I was throwin'

stones, an' you got in the way, my mother was gone South for her health and I was living at William's house with Aunt Amelia. You saw William."

The dark eyes began to show hostility.

"He 's the boy that came out last up there — pretending all over him to be so good. He 's a — he 's a — Pharisee. He 's a hypocrite."

Bill regarded his companion with waxing favor. Those were long words and she took 'em with a bounce. The William-ness of his cousin always rather irked him. Still it was against his nature to go back on one of his tribe for an outsider.

"Call him all that just because he wears his shoes on Sunday. I don't see that goin' barefoot 's got anything to do with bein' good. You could n't go to school in that rig — they 'd run you off the place. Grandfather said you and your brother ought to be in school."

He had touched the sorest spot in the little girl's heart. She began to cry.

"Mrs. Sivley says — Mrs. Sivley 's the old woman with the withered arm, an' grandma 's going to make her whole, an' she has already prayed a lot, an' the arm is n't any better, but Mrs. Sivley always says it is when she comes for meat and meal — Mrs. Sivley told me that father and mother would turn in their graves if they knew that grandmother was bringing Alan an' me up without any education. But grandmother knows best."

"My grandfather 's a famous man — Aunt Amelia says so. He 's written books with stiff backs to 'em

— printed books. He 's got 'em in the bookcase in the library. He 's William the First, my uncle that died was William the Second, and my cousin and I are each of us half of William the Third — anyhow I 'm Bill."

"Well, my grandmother is n't crazy, and she 's as much of a preacher as your grandfather is."

"Well, you need n't call everybody liars that says she 's crazy."

"Anyhow you — you bore false witness," the little girl maintained, her child's heart plainly torn between the strange attraction of this new companion, and loyalty to the creed in which she had been bred.

Bill looked honestly puzzled.

"False witness?" he echoed.

"Yes. I saw — the knife, you know."

Bill edged closer to the girl who could watch the swift movements of his fingers from such a distance and through such a passion, and could see things that Cousin William and his associates had utterly missed.

"Aw — that was n't anything," he said comfortably. "William 's my cousin — we 're both of us half of William the Third — it 's just the same as his havin' a thing when I 've got it. Say — I wish you came to our school. I 'd stick up for you."

"Grandmother says that every immortal spirit has to choose for itself. She made me and Alan stand up and say whether we would chose to go to Heaven or to hell."

Bill considered that proposition at some length. His was a catholic soul.

"I believe I'd like a little of both," he said musingly.

"We chose Heaven," sighed the small girl. "That's the reason we can't ever go to school, 'cause we'd have to wear shoes; and if you wear shoes and braid your hair you'll go to hell."

"Aw," deprecated Bill, "why could n't you be goin' to Heaven in the summer vacations, and have the hell part in the winters when school takes up?"

Something in the climatic conditions seemed to make this very satisfactory to him; he nodded quietly once or twice in applause of his own wisdom. Propping his head on his elbow, clawing up grass with his left hand, he gave this shrewd adversary — a possibly excellent ally — a piece of information that he felt ought to be made known.

"The Pastors' Association met in grandfather's study last time." He talked in a kind of recitative, not being experienced in lengthy speeches. "They did n't know I was there. William an' me got to foolin' an' he locked me in. I woke up an' I heard a lot of what they said about your grandmother. They called her a "— he swallowed, then spat out the Waterloo word —" fanatic. They talked about her not lettin' you go to school. They're goin' to make her quit what she's doin' or leave Watauga."

Bill flung his statements as he flung rocks. He was going on to hurl missiles of a like nature when he noted that the shoulder next his — almost against it — was shaking tempestuously. The child's face was turned away.

"Cry-baby!" he sneered to cover his quick dismay.

There was silence for a long time, only the drowsy hum of insects came from the near-by field to infringe upon the stillness. Then a choked little voice said with lengthened pauses between the words, "I 'm not — crying. I do this way — sometimes — when I 'm — when I 'm sleepy."

"Huh!" commented her host, steeling himself, "if you ain't cryin', what you hidin' your face for?"

"I 'm sleepy!" she protested.

"Go to sleep, then," counseled Bill, latent sympathy vibrant in the boyish tones that strove to mock. "Bye-oh-baby — go to sleep."

The girl dashed a furtive hand across her eyes and turned on him an obstinate, flushed face with half-closed lids flinging dusk shadows of lash on her crimson cheeks.

"I 'm going to sleep," she declared.

"Who 's a — a-bearin' false witness now?" he grinned.

Lynette shut her eyes.

"Oh, all right." He sat still and opposed a solid shoulder, determined to meet silence with silence.

A bee droned. The sun filtered a sleeping powder through the tangled shade of the old fence corner. Murmur of the stream below was the very music of forgetfulness. For five minutes Bill sat, rigid as an Indian; then lengthened, even breathing told him that the little girl really slept. It had been a hard morning for her, and children, closer to nature, repair emotional waste with immediate thrift. She sagged over

against him. Somehow her weight was not exactly a burden. When he would have edged away, he realized that he must not leave her there alone. The man's heritage of responsibility came home to him.

Cautiously he turned his head. He had not fully realized how small she was — how like a bird beaten from the nest by cold rain, and helpless. One hand, not so large as a sparrow, rested, palm upward, on the dusty grass. Why, a fellow would n't step on that — He thought irrelevantly of his mother. He wished she might come and lift the little creature in her arms and carry her to a house that was a home. But mothers did n't do such things, he remembered, and his first puzzled question of why cruelty and mothers abide in the same world hurt him suddenly.

They were singing in the schoolhouse again. His Cousin William's flute tones led. Bill began to be inconsequently sorry about that knife. The agates burned in his pocket. Why had n't William been possessed of the keen eyes hidden now by a small girl's dusky lashes?

His own head nodded; the sun-warmed air, the plenteous silence wrought their spell, and the two children slumbered side by side.

By that Providence which we miscall chance, William the First, Rector of St. Jude's, and Mother Missouri, leader of a futile band of schismatics, met a half hour later in the road directly opposite the peaceful sleep of the missing charges they sought.

"William! William Harvey!" cried the Rector, ignoring Mother Missouri as he caught sight of a pair

of stout legs sticking out into the path and terminating in dusty shoes.

The accost sounded absurd, since the only other William Harvey there was stood beside him, the bag of vestments on a slim arm, an expression of conscious rectitude on a fair, clean face, but Bill, the unafraid, sat up suddenly among the weeds and answered to his grandfather's voice if not to the name.

The tall old woman, on her part, reached silently forward and grasped her grandchild by the shoulder, lifting her out into the dusty road with a sweep which had in it something of menace. The little girl found speech first.

"Grandmother," she choked, looking into the furious face above her, "the Pastors' Association is going to drive us out of Watauga."

Bill got up rather reluctantly. Here was a new score to settle with his grandfather, who was sure to inquire by what means this information had escaped. It was perhaps his first lesson in the dangers of feminine companionship. But he need not have troubled himself at the moment as to his personal responsibility; the matter had got out into the realm of grown folks' affairs. The two preachers, the well-clad, cultured Rector, the mad-looking fanatic, stood confronted, Mother Missouri, with the seven angels of wrath wrestling upon her brow. The Rector of St. Jude's stepped back as though that flaming glance were a physical blow. The woman controlled herself.

"Is this true?" she asked. "What evil have I done? I teach my humble followers the way and

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the truth, even as you claim to do within four walls. I care for my grandchildren and fit them for Heaven by denying them the sinful pleasures of earth."

William stood back with the bag of vestments on his arm, certain that grandfather would do exactly the right thing, and — being very determined to live up to the name — observant of what that right thing might be. But Bill kicked up the ground with an infidel heel, emitted a deep, gruff, "Aw!" and muttered something that might have been, "Come off."

For some reason both grown-ups turned and looked at him.

"Th' — the little girl wants to go to school — that 's what she wants. She ought to learn somethin' besides goin' to Heaven."

The raw statement of an unspoiled mind checked them both. The woman glanced toward the Rector of St. Jude's.

"I — ah — it is the children we feel most concerned for," he admitted. "Everybody has a right to his creed; but the children — surroundings — education —"

He was not half as clear-cut as Bill had been; but between the two Mother Missouri seemed to understand.

"I feared this persecution," she admitted. "I — might — make some concessions about the children."

"I should be very glad to talk it over with you tomorrow," said the Rector eagerly. "May I call on you — and talk it over — and then lay what you say before the Pastors' Association? I — we can cer-

tainly arrive at some more profitable understanding than the present."

"You may come," said Mother Missouri, with the simple authoritativeness of a sovereign.

She walked away in her skimpy black calico bag, the black-calico-bagged child clinging to her hand. After all, there was a majesty in her movements and the little creature she led was a strangely fascinating child. The Rector took his own homeward way thoughtfully. William and Bill, following side by side, forgot to speak of the subject of the six-blader or the agates till they came to the parting of the ways. Then Bill uttered from a contented heart.

"Got that sixth blade open yet?" he demanded with *soto voce* impudence. As the dazed William sought in vain through a clean-swept, orderly mind for taunt or invective which should be a fit reply, he smote upon the "bank" pocket which gave forth a rich whispered chink, and vanished up a side street at speed.

IV

HIS SPELLING

MOTHER MISSOURI made the compromise demanded by the Pastors' Association. When the school term opened, the two children, Alan and Lynette, came, hand in hand, to the Third District schoolhouse, very apprehensive, very silent, but clad in the ordinary garb of school-going juveniles — Bill had talked to his grandfather and made sure of that.

"Ain't any use sending the kids to school in them black calico bags and bare-foot," the apostle of commonsense enunciated, standing with his stubbed hands in his trousers pockets, his feet very wide apart, and scowling earnestly at a grandparent who regarded him with an inscrutable air.

"Yes — yes," the Rector agreed, "I 'll make a point of that. See that you give aid and counsel to these new-comers in your scholastic world."

William the First had a way of making these enigmatic remarks to both his grandsons. William took them as a tribute to his precocious intelligence. Bill merely snorted.

"I said I 'd stick up for her," he maintained.

So when Brent Tarver shouted on the first day of

their advent, "Ain't they a couple o' buzzards?" Bill replied with the neat retort,

"Ain't you a white canary?"

As a pair of very capable fists were ready to argue this point Brent did not press the matter and the two reached the teachers without further molestation.

There was an attempt in the Third District school to keep the boys and girls separate; they sat on opposite sides of the room and played in yards, between which there was a tall board fence. The barrier served to set some value on an association which otherwise would have been flat and negligible. Alan Starr and his little sister, whose name the teacher had written on the register as Linnet, and who henceforth answered to that address, were allowed to occupy the same seat in compliance with a note from their grandmother. This would have set them apart from their schoolmates had they not already been, in some measure, pariahs. Beyond that, they were amazingly proficient in their lessons, low-spoken, timid, shy about engaging in any of the sports on the playground or even contemplating them too long.

The Starr children attended school regularly for two terms, holding strangely aloof from the other pupils, yet not in any hostile spirit. Bill found, somewhat to his disgust, that his friendly intervention with the little girl with the bird's name, had won him the brother's deathless allegiance. It was sickening to have a boy who sat with his sister tagging you about all the time. And that Linnet, why even the teacher

could hardly hear her when she answered in class. She was 'fraid of her shadow. Now there was Maida Crawford, a girl most big enough to be in high school, who said she was going through the grade again for fun. Her voice could be heard all over the room. To be sure her answers were often not quite correct in spite of her confident air, but she was a power on the playground and had begun to put on ladyfied ways. Bill was not yet where this latter counted for much with him, yet the fact that it attracted William caused him to note it in the same spirit that he always took stock of any article that might be advantageously traded with his cousin. Aside from such things as this he had small use for Maida Crawford, and her like, at this period.

The public school that William and Bill attended had contracted a vicious habit of "spelling down." Caught from some malign instructor who had been brought up in the country schools, it continued to pit its boys and girls against each other every Friday afternoon a canny teacher giving out words suited to the grade of the pupil, and thus letting the little ones last awhile. Bill loathed these contests, in which he was always promptly worsted and sent to his seat, while William flourished grandly on to the end and frequently came out victor for the boys' side.

"You can't spell any more 'n a rabbit, Bill," Maida shouted at him as she stood on the steps that lifted her above the tall, board fence between the playgrounds during forenoon recess, on Friday. "You stayed home from school last Friday, and the Friday

before, just to get out of it; but if you let us girls beat you this afternoon —" She laughed.

Bill wriggled with the dying squirm of bait on a hook.

"Aw, rats!" he emitted deep in his throat, yet coming, fascinated, to stand close under the fence. "What's eating you girls? Who told you I stayed home to get out of the spelling-match. I was sick."

"We'll see who's sick this afternoon," mocked the big girl, shaking her braids and rustling her skirts.

"Bill Harvey's the best speller in this school," cried the voice of rank partisanship.

Bill turned and scowled upon the adoring dark eyes of Alan Starr. It was intolerable.

"First thing a kid like you wants to learn is not to butt in," he growled, dropping down from the tentative hold he had set upon the fence, turning his back upon the gusts of laughter that assailed him from the girls' side.

Further to relieve his feelings he dashed at the Starr youth, grappled with him and sent his cap over the wall into the feminine playground.

"Now you've done it, Bill," William, the monitor, complained. "There goes the warning-bell, and you'll catch it if that cap's found on the wrong side of the fence. You threw it over."

Bill glanced uncertainly at his clean, tidy cousin.

"You can go get it," he said. "Nobody'll know you from a girl."

William was so used to obeying the impulses Bill

conveyed to him that he was half-way to the fence before he recalled himself, checked and glanced up. The boys were all looking; it was nearly time for the second bell. Maida Crawford reached down a hand of doubtful whiteness, the very knuckles infringed upon by school-girl rings.

"Come ahead," she proffered assistance elegantly.

William was almost twelve; lifting his eyes he beheld a new kingdom in the world of men — the eternal feminine aloft, beckoning, pink-ribboned, smiling, a jeweled hand held down — to him!

Bill witnessed his cousin's slow, blissful, upward progress with alien eyes. As he realized that he had actually put something worth while in William's way, his glance became baleful. Hearing Maida's continued trills of joy, and waiting for William's return, he reflected that anything another fellow wanted was worth taking away from him.

As William reached ground once more, Alan's cap in his hand, Bill laid hold of his arm and wrenched it back painfully. There was a thing that he could always do when in doubt. The second bell sounded, the monitor scurried for his lines without any attempt at reprisal. Hostilities were over, so far as the morning session was concerned.

Now war also waged intermittently between the pupils of the Third District school and the youthful Africans who tenanted the neighborhood of Soapsuds Alley and attended a separate Third District school, colored, of their own. Napoleon Bonaparte led the sable legions to victory, and Bill was as good a cham-

pion as could be found for the hereditary oppressors. When he came panting up the hill that afternoon, purposely late in the hope of missing the spelling-match, he found the Soapsuds Alley contingent out in full force. Being alone, and failing to see the captain, with whom he could always treat, Bill drew up and studied the situation. As he halted, he observed the Starr children, hand in hand as usual, scudding desperately ahead of him. They were seldom tardy, and the hostile demonstrations of the negroes added evidently to their perturbation. They faltered uncertainly facing the black children.

With the discovery that these were not only Third District pupils, but Mother Missourians, fists and mouths opened simultaneously and for a moment stones and imprecations flew. Bill saw Alan hold up his book-satchel, put his arm around his little sister, and attempt to bolt through. But dark faces circled them. The negroes had got the worst of it only that morning, and Mr. Broxton was threatening to summon the police. The oppressed remembered their wrongs and set in methodically to notch the remembrance on various portions of youthful Starr anatomy. It was characteristic of brother and sister that they struggled mutely. Had not Bill been in sight of the fracas nobody in the school would have had notice of it. He leaped forward, giving the peculiar whistle of the Third District school, adding the yell his class had invented, swift to the joy of a combat which he now deemed just.

The boys in the school-yard answered with a shout

and came pouring through the gate; they fell over the board fence yelling. The principal made an incautious sally after them, loudly ordering instant return to bounds, encountered a hail of pebbles and retreated as swiftly as he had come forth. The pebbles still pursuing he was forced to retreat behind the swinging doors of the vestibule, whence he commanded — and none heard.

"Stop! Stop instantly! This is rioting. I'll expel any boy that engages in it!"

Here was whistling down the wind indeed; but as he made an end the triumph of civilization was made manifest. The last bell clanged. Here was the voice of Law. One might — one often did — disregard old Broxey's mandate, hoping for some favorable turn in the subsequent argument; but the bell, the Word of Law, their ears had been taught to obey since they were first graders — you could n't argue with the bell! Brazen and high-hung, pride and commander of the school, it spoke and was silent — and no fellow's parents had ever got a recommendation to mercy from its outraged majesty. Even the blacks, school-children themselves, understood when their enemies whirled and answered its summons. This was not retreat — it was obedience to law and order.

Professor Broxton stood on the steps between two of his teachers as the file formed in the yard and marched up and along the hall. Noses were damaged, coats torn, there were limping feet, but the lines were perfect. Bill, on the landing, in his position of school drummer beat the time for their movements while a

thin streak of blood trickled from his forehead down his nose.

The principal, consoled that his boys were in fairly good physical condition, daunted by the sizable undertaking of expelling the whole male portion of his school, decided instead to ask the Rector of St. Jude's to address them some Friday on the subject of world peace, the disarmament of nations.

Bill was conscious as he went to his seat of that Linnet girl looking barrels of sympathy at his gashed forehead. He got out the court-plaster to put on it somewhat reluctantly. He resented, yet joyed in, her notice. But he soon forgot it, a battle more trying to his soul lay before him. In the lust of fight, he had brought himself within hearing of the school-bell at the appointed hour. It was out of the question to play tardy now and avoid the spelling. He raised his hand to his conveniently injured brow, then held it waggling in the air, and demanded permission to go to the basement and wash his face. It was granted.

He washed with a thoroughness that would have pleased his mother, that would even have satisfied his Aunt Amelia. He cut the court-plaster in fancy shapes, and applied it wilfully in wrong places, soaking it off again and preparing a new strip. He had heard sounds that told him the boys and girls were rising from their desks and moving into line shortly after he left the room. Well he knew how they stood there, swaying, emulous, half of them terrified, and the others sheepishly confident, the girls pleating apron edge or dress in nervous fingers. "And spellin' like

machines," he muttered to himself over his third piece of court plaster. "Spellin' like machines — just like they was all oiled inside an' they opened their mouths an' — out it flopped."

He had heard the footsteps of defeated contestants going back to desks. He made an excuse to himself of losing the jack-knife with which he had been cutting his court-plaster and searched for it in all sorts of outrageous places. He caught sight of Poly Bony's black face above the yard fence, and tip-toed through the halls and out of the door to a lengthened conversation with Aunt Candace's boy. The recent battle was discussed. Points were argued and a sort of truce finally patched up. Then Bill turned in some dismay toward the schoolhouse. He could be seen from the windows. Besides he did n't want to wait until school was dismissed. Surely that spelling was over.

Linnet, standing with her little hands behind her, the last but one on the girl's side, looked with sudden deep sympathy at the sick dismay on Bill's countenance as he opened the door and found he had returned in time for the very crux of the spelling match — the crucial moment when everybody's eyes were focussed on the result and defeat was doubly humiliating. In her dismay, she spelled her easy, small word so low that Professor Broxton decided it to be incorrect and sent her to her seat. She went patiently, glad to do a little something in the way of sacrifice — though all unknown — to lay upon the shrine of her hero. Her great eyes followed Bill's every movement as he put

himself heavily in line below William and her brother Alan. She saw his hand go up to his head — he could n't find the court-plaster now without feeling for it — and she was suddenly swamped by the mother instinct that is in every feminine heart, however youthful, and that goes out first and most fondly to the wounded male.

Professor Broxton, having found Bill easily puzzled by an easy word, slipped in between the three deckers, offered him the word Linnet had supposedly missed — " fresh."

Maida drooped a white forehead and studied her shoes, her eyes peeping sidewise at the miserable Bill.

He wriggled. He could bat and he could swim, could wrestle a fellow double his size, he had just closed a most advantageous treaty with the insurgents from Soapsuds Alley. But what did a body want to spell for anyhow? He was n't going to write histories or things. It was all very well for girls — they had to get up invitations to parties and such. Let 'em — the telephone was easier and lots quicker. You did n't have to spell over telephones.

" Fresh."

He looked at Maida Crawford. He gazed upon her self-advertised best dress — made short though she was in her teens. The flutter of her pink hair ribbons hypnotized him. The preference for a certain girl is as contagious among males as the measles — and breaks out as inconsequently. Bill was suddenly hot with envy of William's recent favor — and William

was smirking there above him preparing to win another triumph.

"Fresh."

The tragedy and its hour were met! Poor Bill could not imagine a plain everyday word in a spelling match. On those former days when he had skulked, his mates bore him weird tales of tongue-twisters in which the quantity of the big fellows was made up for by the mystery of anything short. He made an honest boy's effort to live up to that tradition.

"Fresh," he pronounced cautiously, as though afraid of breaking the word between his teeth. "F-r-e" he was in for it, the blood seemed boiling about his eyes, "a-ee—" Amazement held the room silent. Something brought his glance around toward little Linnet, sitting brown and small at her desk. She was violently signaling to her brother. Bill shifted his feet as though feeling for the right letter on the floor. He looked through the window, at the closed door, at the dictionary on the stand, like him cornered and dumb, though very wise inside. What had he heard of h as an aspirate? He drew in his breath and hissed the questionable consonant.

As though the sound had been a signal, a gale of appreciation burst forth. Maida led the outburst. The chorus of the defeated ones in the desks acclaimed a more spectacular failure than any of them had made. Even sedate Professor Broxton leaned weakly against his desk and laughed until his eyes were full of tears.

Bill, exhausted from his intellectual effort, was dazed by its result; but it would have gone ill with any

author of a spelling-book who had fallen into his hands in that hour.

Maida Crawford pealed on musically with high-pitched, girlish laughter. As breath failed, she subsided into giggles, gusty, intermittent giggles that set off the other girls after the storm had lulled.

When the professor's own laugh was out, he rapped for order. He looked impatiently at the sole representative on the girls' side.

"How can I pass the word to you until you can control yourself?" he inquired. "Bill — sit down. You 're out. Very well, Maida Crawford, if you 'd rather laugh than spell, sit down. William, take the word."

William took the word that Bill had missed. It would be a triumph sweeter than usual to directly down his cousin in a spelling match.

"Fresh," he repeated, smiling a little at the foolishness of trying to confuse minds like his with trick words.

He paused a moment, in his lofty confidence; there was a hand in the air at one of the desks. Professor Broxton recognized it.

"Well — Linnet," he said with the tender intonation elders always gave this child.

She stood up very timidly but very straight, and spoke louder than anybody had ever heard her in that schoolroom.

"Please, Professor, is it against the rules to give out foreign words?" she asked.

The professor frowned a little, then he laughed

again. Miss Doty, the assistant, already had her handkerchief to her mouth.

But her suggestion had done for William. Foreign words!

"F—" he paused and implored Miss Doty with his eyes. He was supposed to be Miss Doty's pet, but the lady could not restrain her amusement in time—"I did n't understand the word, Professor Broxton," he said pathetically.

"Inattention is synonymous with failure in a spelling match," said the professor using more big words than anybody in the room could have spelled. "Alan — fresh."

William passed dolefully to his seat. And then Alan Starr, the best speller in the Third District school, and one whom Professor Broxton himself had once had to give a word from the dictionary itself before he could get him out of the line to his seat, nodded to his little sister and spelled bravely.

"F-r-e-s-c-h-e."

There was only an intermittent giggle at this, for Linnet's inquiry had confused the duller intelligences.

"We don't want to make a joke of these spelling matches," said Professor Broxton testily, but Alan went quietly to his seat beside Linnet, having refused to spell down the boy who had been good to her.

At recess Bill walked as in a cloud; his brow was black; thunder brooded on it, and none dare speak to the disgraced champion. Only Alan Starr, strong in his knowledge of what he had given up for the other's sake, approached.

Bill glowered. If the Mother Missourian thought to win favor by such means, he should be speedily undeceived.

"D'j'you miss that word on purpose?" he demanded.

"I could n't"— Alan was apologetic. "I could n't spell you down — after what you did for sister and me this morning."

"Oh, you could n't! You 're a bright chap, now, ain't you? Think I can't live without you, I suppose? Think I need your help in this school?"

"I don't know." Alan felt his way blindly in this new sort of intercourse with the "world's people." Suddenly his eyes lighted. "I needed yours," he cried, as one exulting, "when they were rocking us, and you brought the other boys —"

"You need n't lay it up against us," grudged Bill. "We 'd have done as much for a dog — a white dog."

Resentfully he turned when a bit of folded paper tumbled at their feet; they were standing close to the division fence between the play-grounds. Bill stooped and picked up the tiny square; it was a much creased note, addressed to Mr. William Harvey, Esq., the Third.

He opened and read it. Was n't he Mr. William Harvey, Esq., the Third? Well, I guess so. He was, when he wanted to be. Satisfaction spread over his darkened countenance, lighting the gloom. Maida Crawford intimated that some one whom she called Mr. William Harvey, Esq., the Third, might walk

home with her after school. He looked up to find William glaring at him.

"Ain't that my note?" the monitor asked.

"I reckon not," said Bill easily, "or it 'd be in your pocket."

He was tucking it carefully away in his own as he spoke. His eye fell on Alan's chagrined countenance — would the "buzzard" tell? But no, the Starr boy turned away and left the cousins together.

Silently they went around to the front entrance. Most of the school had dispersed. Linnet and her brother were already half-way down the hill.

Maida Crawford came slowly through the hall — alone. That was her best dress that she had on. Her hat was pushed far back on her head, and all the little loose locks around her face were "fluffed out." She had been doing it that way before the cloak-room mirror for ten minutes. She carried a Friday afternoon pack of books, and a sumptuous lunch-box. Her glance took in the two boys appreciatively.

Now was William's opportunity. One bold move and all was retrieved. But William's upbringing had not made for boldness, exigency. He stood and blushed silently while his cousin stepped forward and, with no flourish, assumed the lady's impedimenta.

She let him have them with a sugared smile, screwing her lips up to make a dimple. William learned with anguish that the blandishments which had pulled him over the fence for that cap were on tap for others.

Then Bill did an unbelievable thing. A conqueror, his province spread before him, he pushed the books

and lunch-box into William's astonished hands, saw unmoved Maida's open disappointment, observed with a grin the indignant switch of her short skirts; thrust his fists deep in his pockets, and strode after the Starr children, whistling.

V

HIS DRUM

IT was most unfortunate that the contention concerning the drum should have been between William and Bill. Professor Broxton might have known, when Bill was at home with the mumps, that it would be better to give his drum to any other boy in the Third District school than William Harvey.

William had a quiet, complying way that commended him to his teachers and elders — particularly the women. Maida Crawford had never gotten over a desire to make trouble between the cousins, and when she was put in as substitute, teaching the first-graders on the upper floor of the Third District school, she went to Professor Broxton with the statement that Bill had always drummed too fast — and too loud — and that William ought really to be allowed to keep the drum permanently.

"It ain't fair," said Bill, lashing his books together with a turn. "When I got back to school, I found William had got my drum all out of order. A drum 's a thing that 's got feeling to it, Mother, and William ain't got a bit of understanding of it, if he

can sing like a seraphine and a cherry-bounce, as Aunt Candace says."

"Well, you can put it back in order now," said Mrs. Harvey, pacifically, handing an overlooked arithmetic to her son.

"That 's just it," returned Bill cryptically, "I won't get any chance to put it in order. Old Broxy 's made William drummer of the school — he 's got my drum for keeps — unless I do something about it."

"Do something," echoed his mother. "Now see here, son — what can you do about it? Professor Broxton made you drummer. For some reason you 've been unsatisfactory, and he gave the position to your cousin. You 've got to be a good citizen, Billy, and obey your chief."

Bill grinned and tucked his head down. It was no use trying to deceive his mother and talk about the drum having been taken from him while he had the mumps.

"Well, those big girl teachers are sillies, complaining that I drum too fast and drum too loud. It 's come time that I 've got to punch William's head, and take my drum away from him."

"All the drummer boys in history obeyed their chiefs," said Ruth Harvey, following her son to the door. There was a little smile on the lips so like Bill's.

"Yah! But you did n't say I must n't punch William's head for him — and I 'll do it."

Bill plunged at his mother for the kiss which was apt to be considerably like a puppy's snap.

"Ruth," remarked the head of the family, from his place at the breakfast table, "what do you expect that boy of yours to come to — encouraging him to fight his relatives in this scandalous fashion?"

But there was no real criticism in the tone and Ruth Harvey stopped a moment behind her husband's chair to pat his shoulder. They both knew that the Bill-ness of the boy must work itself out even as his William-ness would have had to be worked out.

Nevertheless Professor James J. Broxton, familiarly and affectionately called Old Broxey, was immeasurably shocked as the last orderly line passed in that day at noon to note two lads rolling over and over on the ground in front of his schoolhouse door, the shorter and broader punching away methodically with a pair of very capable brown fists, while the older and taller merely tried to fend and struggle free.

"William — Bill! Bill — William! I 'm ashamed of you — cousins and —"

The boys dropped sheepishly apart and scrambled to their feet.

"I 'm very thorry, Profethor," William managed to say politely in spite of a cut and bleeding lip.

"Bill," said the principal, all the associates of the two Williams found it necessary to differentiate the names thus, "you were the aggressor. What have you to say for yourself?"

Bill, in some doubt as to what an aggressor might be, stood looking down and fumbling at a scratch on his hand.

"My drum —" he began and broke off.

"Now see here — Harvey," returned the principal wearily, "I 've heard about all of this drum matter that I want to hear. Maida Crawford — and others — have lodged complaint that you make more noise than necessary in beating for the lines."

"Too much noise," cried Bill. "Noise is what a drum 's for. You 've got to strike just so hard to make folks feel it. They would n't — they would n't come a-running if I was to tap like William does, as if I was crocheting."

He looked anxiously into the man's face to see if he comprehended. Bill had been made drummer when the drum was first bought for the Third District school. He had carried the instrument home and practised until his suffering family drove him forth. Then he took it to the rectory, and Aunt Candace defended him in the carriage-house there, though she suggested that "sech a racket mought scare the hens outer layin', an' hit was mighty apt to make the cows' milk sour." Could n't Old Broxey see that some men are born drummers and others will never achieve the technique? Apparently he could not.

"I have received numerous complaints that you persisted in drumming too fast," said Professor Broxton abruptly. He found it hard to sustain or meet the gaze of those drowned eyes, eyes that were wont to be so unflinching, even aggressive in their glances.

"Well," growled the deposed drummer, who had thought this thing out during the mumps, "there 's more short legs than long ones in this building, and they step quicker — it 's hard for 'em to march in

slow time. When Maida Crawford kept that room, she would n't answer fire-drills because she said the children make such a mess of it, an' when I told her she was a — when I spoke to her about it, she got mad and said I drummed too fast. I beat my time so that First Readers can hold it easy, and if the big fellows have to jump a little I reckon it won't hurt 'em." He glanced at William squirming like a dignified angle worm to get the soil off the back of his jacket. "I 'll lick any boy that goes to fooling with my drum," he added staunchly.

"I 'm the person for you to lick, Harvey," said the principal, as they entered the building. "I put William in your place; I gave him the drum. There was no use in striking him. Come to my office both of you."

Bill surveyed "Old Broxey's" back resentfully.

"If you 'll wait two or three years, I 'll try it, sir," he volunteered suddenly, as they were mounting the steps.

"What?" interrogated the principal, wheeling upon the culprit. "Oh, to whip me? I only said it was the more logical procedure. A man who depends on his fists instead of his brains is apt to run short of the latter." And he led the way into his office.

"I 'd rather he had it, thir," William mumbled as the shadow of the "chamber of horrors" fell upon them.

The principal pretended not to hear. "You must have attacked William," he charged Bill severely. "He was certainly taking punishment when I

came up. He was n't even attempting to hit back."

"He could n't," Bill chuckled, irrepressibly. "I had a neck hold and —"

"That will do, sir. I am not blind. Remain where you are. William, you may go upstairs and join your class, now. The parade goes past here at ten-thirty o'clock. You will be expected to drum the lines out. They pass down to the corner of Exeter Avenue to salute the flag. Then you drum them back. Now I 've settled this matter once for all." And the principal followed William out and upstairs.

Burning with the injustice of it, Bill humped himself over the delinquent's chair in the office. Hands on knees, staring into a future that should be drumless, towards a point that should see him "big enough to lick a man," he sat there very still, brooding, for nearly an hour.

He had tried so hard to do his best in that one position. Nobody but his mother knew quite how hard he did try, for his Bill-ness would break over and swamp all the desirable William-ness of him. He wished he could see and speak to that one soul who understood him, for just a moment now. She would comfort him with a word or a look. For, oh, the drum! It seemed more than he could bear. The drum had meant so much to him. The young male, as the young nation, is always war-like, its first music martial; Bill was at the age for the soldier dream, and the sticks between his fingers, the rattle and roll on the hollow sheepskin, these talked to the boy soul of danger and duty, of trysts with death unflinchingly

kept. Stout, stubbed Bill Harvey was not a visionary youth; this was the one outlet for the poetry that was in him — an epic lay.

Professor Broxton had been called to that teacherless room upstairs where Maida Crawford proved her inefficiency every day. Bill could hear sounds emanating from that direction which suggested the stirring combination of a pillow fight, a small menagerie in commotion, and a ladies' afternoon tea. A pretty one, he commented, to put in charge of the First Grade — a girl who always sat in the schoolroom with one slipper off, and pretended not to hear the fire-drill — and then complained that he drummed too fast. The subject was painful; he tried to distract his attention by glancing about the office and his eyes fell on a new electrical apparatus that had just been installed. Yesterday its use to call a fire-drill had precipitated a panic. The boy sat studying the various buttons on the wall. This one was for lights. That one would set the bell ringing that did all the mischief yesterday. He remembered with a little sick feeling how the children had come, avalanche-like, breaking lines, screaming, pushing past each other, frantic, their faces scarcely to be recognized, only to pile up in that dreadful heap at the stair foot where little Susie Coulter got a broken arm, Buster Crane had a collar-bone fractured, and several were bruised and scratched. Two large girls had fainted, all of the women teachers screamed. And William, at the first stampede, had stood motionless, pale lipped, the drum-sticks silent between his fingers.

"Gee! I don't see how they're ever going to use that thing for fire-drill," Bill ruminated. "And if there was a sure-enough fire—"

He broke off suddenly. Along the hall came the feet of one who stumbled and ran; there was the sound of a boy breathing hard and William dashed into the office gasping.

"Bill—the basement's all on fire. I can't find the janitor. What'll we do?"

Amelia Harvey's own apprehensive, over-sensitive soul looked from her son's white face. The cut lip Bill had given him showed a purple welt. The boy unused to hardship, never left to decide anything for himself, was utterly unnerved in the presence of peril.

Bill leaped to his feet, all alive, alert in an instant.

"Hold on," he said, as he saw William starting across the room. "What you 'bout?"

"I'm going to turn in the fire-alarm," the older boy chattered his reply through rattling teeth.

Bill launched himself on his cousin, but without rancor. He may have struck him, but there was no anger in the blow.

"You let that fire-alarm alone," he growled. "D' you want to see 'em come fallin' downstairs and killin' each other like they did yesterday?"

"I'll run and tell Old Broxey," shivered William, who, to do him justice, did not lack a sort of courage. "Let's holler fire. Something's got to be done. They may do better than they did yesterday."

"They'll do worse than ever," countered Bill. "Broxey told 'em fire-drill should n't be used again

without notice unless there was a real fire — old fool. Hold on a minute, can't you? There's got to be a better way."

As the two boys stood shivering in the ground floor office there came to them the far-away sound of music, a hurdy-gurdy man turning into the avenue at the corner. It gave Bill the hint he needed. The parade! The building would empty quick enough if children and teachers could be made to believe that the parade was coming.

"We'll drum 'em out," he cried, springing toward the landing where the drum lay with its sticks beside it. He had it in his own hands before he realized that he and William were not one. Then he silently offered it to his cousin.

"I can't. I'd break down and scare 'em," William avowed. "I'll run to the corner and turn in the fire-alarm for the department."

Bill had just taken up the sticks and whirled the first tattoo when the door of his own room opened and Linnet Starr came slipping down. As she passed on the stair, too timid to look up at him, he spoke through the noise of the drum.

"When you get down there — stay down."

She looked back startled at that, but went on, mouse-like, obedient. He saw her disappear behind the turn that led toward the basement.

Two minutes after she came running up the stairs again, still mute, but her white face showing that she knew.

"I told you to stay down," growled Bill. "What

you comin' back for?" And he drummed energetically.

They could hear doors opening upstairs as the monitors went out into the hall.

"The First-Graders," breathed Linnet, and over all the stir and bustle, her clear whisper was audible to the boy. "Maida Crawford 's just like that — she won't let 'em come until she 's been downstairs and asked. I 'm going to tell 'em."

Bill thrust out a foot so suddenly that it would have tripped her as she passed him, had she not been quick and light on her feet.

"About the fire?" he demanded sternly.

"I 'll tell them to come down," faltered the little girl.

"Say it 's the parade," ordered Bill, and dismissed her to her fate.

Up in the seventh grade room Professor Broxton had just called B class in arithmetic. Suddenly as his pupils were rising in the aisle, came the sound of the drum from the landing below.

Flushed with quick anger, the professor lowered his book and listened. Then he looked at his watch. It lacked half an hour of time for the parade to pass. Parades are always failing to keep appointments, but nobody ever heard of one coming too early. He hesitated, uncertain. The drum spoke on. He had left Bill in disgrace in his office. He had excused William a few moments before to go to the basement. One or the other of the Harveys was drumming the school out. In some manner, beyond the capacity of

mere sticks and sheepskin, the tattoo told the professor that Bill, not William, was doing the drumming.

As he hesitated, the pupils of B class began dropping into their seats and putting their books away and a few of the A class rose. They were looking to him for the signal-bell. Other teachers were obeying the drum, for the sound of opening doors and moving feet was all through the building. Broxton struck his bell and sent the monitors to the doors. Whatever explanations might be forthcoming later the matter was temporarily beyond his jurisdiction. Lines had risen and were passing out. The rhythm of many feet went down the stairs and through the halls. How swiftly the drum beat.

Rat-a-tat — rat-a-tat — there was nothing uncertain in its voice. It spoke out, a Bill utterance unmistakable. The first impulse of anger died within Bill's teacher. He knew the boy would never make a mock of that prized position, but certainly those young teachers who complained that he had played too fast for them were justified. He stood in his room door watching the swiftly moving orderly lines. Faster, faster — how those strokes rattled! Really, it was outrageous.

"That amounts to a quick-step — a regular gallop," muttered the principal, going forward to the banisters where he could look down at the drummer who was making the staves fly.

Some of the boys in Bill's class had noted the acceleration of time and make a joke of it, trotting

comically as they passed him. Broxton had parted his lips for reproof when the drummer spoke.

"Quit that!" he burst out, a nervous edge on his tones, quite unconscious that he had broken rules and spoken in the hall. "Keep your lines straight. Get down there in good time."

The undertone was fierce.

"Quit your foolishness. Dog-gone it, keep your lines straight!"

Broxton ran hastily down the stairs after the last of the seventh grade lines and laid a stern hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Two demerits for talking in the hall," he said sharply. "Retard your time. This is too fast. Who gave you the signal for the drum, anyhow, Harvey? Why — have you — the drum?"

"Let me alone," said Bill, breaking away from the constraining grasp. "I dars n't go any slower — I dars n't. Get 'em out! Get 'em out!"

The steady stroke of his drum had never once intermitted. Professor Broxton looked at this pupil of his who had suddenly taken command. Then aroused to keener observation by the boy's strange behavior, he saw what Bill had intended he should see — little wreaths of smoke that stole up the small back stair — a stair that ran all the way from basement to tower.

The principal of the Third District school looked from the crawling smoke wreaths to the passing stream of childish faces and he quailed. He saw that though the smoke began to sting their eyes a bit, no

one had yet realized that there was anything worse on hand than a smoky furnace — that exasperating furnace that had been giving them so much trouble of late. He saw, too, how they were kept in motion and carried along by that insistent beat — beat — beat, of the drum like a heart that fills the arteries after consciousness has departed, a mechanical life-giver knowing no law but fear of its own cessation.

One by one the teachers had followed their pupils out on the landings. The lower halls were clouding with a blue haze now. Surely some one would see the situation in a moment. Already they began to look curiously at Bill standing in his usual position, drumming away for dear life, his eyes straight ahead, his face colorless, a smile on his lips; something the whirling sticks said to them which he dare not utter.

"Good for you, Bill," breathed the professor as the last of the older lines were safely past the basement stairway. "You've done hero work — but we've got to get out of this now."

Bill's face was white under the tan, but there was no break in his voice as he answered:

"I — can't — go!" He was drumming as he spoke. "Got to drum the little ones out. Why don't they come?"

"My God — the babies!" There was a sob in Broxton's voice as he wheeled and started to the stairs, intent only on snatching the poor little First-Graders bodily from danger.

"Don't go up there," Bill warned him sharply.

"You 'll scare 'em. I sent a girl — she 'll bring 'em out, if I keep on drummin'."

Rat-a-tat! Rrrrrr-rat-a-tat — rat-a-tat! Good old drum, how true you rang that day! Down the stairs they came at last, little girls laughing while short skirts "cheesed" out in the swift pace, and short legs twinkled as their owners half ran to keep step with the rapid roll of your insistence.

"He goes fast for us," giggled one little girl to another.

"Miss Maida ought to of let us out sooner," panted a sturdy small boy. "Bill Harvey, he 's a drummin' us out quick so we won't miss the p'rade."

So much faith had they in their drummer and their drum — and by faith they were saved. Gusty giggles shook the line as they passed on steady feet through the smoke-hung hallway. Broxton stood uncertainly where he was. Bill looked up and saw Linnet just preparing to follow when Maida Crawford at last got her hat on satisfactorily and emerged. Then a scream rang out, the children checked and began to cry.

Bill said something under his breath that might have been a prayer, or only a boy's "Dog-gone it!" The huddled lines, ready to run in any direction, the turn of the lower stairway just before them, where they had piled up in a panic yesterday — Bill felt he could not bear it.

"Children," Broxton's agonized, shaking tones bade fair to increase the panic. Maida did not scream again, but stood where she was, sobbing noisily, hys-

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terically. Linnet ran back and dragged distressfully at her arm.

"Go get that girl," Bill ordered, as though he had been the principal, and Broxton his pupil. "Make her shut up. G'wan kids — ain't I drummin' for you?"

The query sounded so home-like and everyday — it was such a Bill speech that the line moved on automatically. They were out in the sunlight, Bill had seen Linnet and the professor with the sobbing Crawford girl in his arm, go past him, before ever he relaxed the steady rat-a-tat of the drum.

Then he came blinking out on the top step at the front door, suddenly aware that his mouth was dry and that his knees felt queer.

A fire-engine was tearing around the corner — William had done his part of the work according to schedule. There was a pool of muddy water all across the walk and the First-Graders were plugging right through it. At the fence a lot of people were jumping around and hollering. Why, they 'd knocked down a whole panel of it and were sailing across as though the place belonged to them. Bill's gaze dropped to the great hose that lay like a lazy snake athwart his path. All at once he noticed that he was hugging his drum, though its work was done — well done. He looked in some dismay at the present and coming crowd of frantic mothers and fathers and friends. Gee! he would n't go down into that.

William's face, white and scared, was a relief. Bill ran to his cousin, never relinquishing the drum. The

engine swept past them into the girls' yard and commenced to fight the fire in earnest, working through the big basement windows. A boy's healthy interest in any fire caused the two lads to turn and watch them. A fireman dashed up the steps and stood where Bill had stood a moment before.

"All out — every one of them, and safe," cried the principal triumphantly. "Here's the boy that drummed them out. Here's your hero, ladies and gentlemen."

That was an awful thing to say. William and Bill clung together with the drum between them. People shouted, whether they were standing within a foot of you, or trying to make you hear across the chaos of the school-yard. It seemed to Bill that everybody was running to somebody else, grabbing hold of them, or whooping and flinging their arms in the air. He saw women hide their heads on the shoulders of other women while they wept. He watched them grab up children, hug them, and then burst out crying. Men shook their fists at the sky. People got the wrong children and hugged them and threw them away and picked up the right ones and forgot to hug them.

After that speech of Old Broxey's Bill was afraid to look anybody in the face.

"Let's make a sneak," he whispered hoarsely to William.

They were making a sneak, getting decently away from the rewards of heroism, when Maida Crawford suddenly crossed their path. With so much on hand, her hysterics were going unheeded. She rushed for-

ward and flung herself upon William and Bill collectively.

"Oh, you hero — you hero!" she shrieked. "This town ought to thank you on its bended knees."

Bill had an instant's comical vision of Watauga on bended knees. The weight of a well-developed girl proved oppressive. Professor Broxton stood opportunely by.

"You take her," Bill offered ingratiatingly. Then, as the tender burden was shifted, he added dolefully, "She 's busted our drum, William."

VI

HIS FIRST KISS

THEY were having yellow fever that year at New Orleans. After a while it crept as far up the river as Memphis, and Watauga, from giving all she could generously to the fund for the relief of the yellow fever sufferers, and resting secure in the belief that such a disease would not climb to the mountains, drew her quarantine tight against the incursions of fleeing refugees and began to be frightened. They had sent three young doctors south, and the word was that they might better keep all they had, as possibly they would need them later on. Conservative people smiled over that and the vested choir of St. Jude's went on preparing the sacred concert it was going to give for the yellow fever fund. They were getting up tableaux, and Linnet Starr's teacher had persuaded Mother Missouri to let the little girl be in them. The child's beauty, that famous loveliness which had been the heritage of all the women of her family, was beginning to be remarked upon. William was in the tableaux, but Bill came in only as a member of the choir.

This vested choir was an admired institution in Watauga; there were grown-ups and semi-grown-

ups in it. William had developed a boy-soprano of exquisite timbre, and often sang solos. Bill was a member mainly because he was William's cousin and the Rector's grandson. Maida Crawford, still wearing ankle dresses and braided locks looped about her head, sang with the altos at the end of the bench next Bill. This was a boon to that young man, only because he saw that it ate into William's soul. William had confided to his cousin a determination to kiss Maida Crawford at some date in the future as yet indefinite. He was subsequently made to wish that he had not been so confidential, but Bill stowed away the information in his mind and it caused him to like to sit next to Maida, and also to give her a good deal more attention than he usually bestowed on a girl.

Kiss her? Maybe it would be nice. But then, what would a fellow do afterwards? Aw, shucks — William was daffy — he was nutty about girls. Bill leaned back in his seat and stared with some surprise at a not over small white hand, still crowded with school-girl rings, swinging close to his own. Hypnotized on the phenomenon he seemed to see before him the school-yard, a boy climbing, a hand — that hand — stretched down toward the aspirant. Hah! would n't William just love to get a chance like this? Bill was sure that he was about to catch Maida's hand and squeeze it when the bass, a little rotund man, bounced to his feet and fired off a query.

"By whose order," he put it squarely to the choir directress, "by whose order, may I ask, was that — little door — closed?"

The juvenile portion of the choir grinned delightedly and settled itself on the uncomfortable benches for the row that must ensue. Was this not the usual procedure at choir-practice? The unfortunate directress was in for at least three scrimmages at each session. And added interest displayed itself in regard to the bass's contention, because the little door in question was a blessed privilege to all of them — an exit by which they might slip away after the opening hymn and miss the sermon, stealing back in time to bear their part in the concluding services.

"I presume it was the vestry. I had nothing to do with it, myself," asserted the directress with her usual monotonous, irritating calm. "All rise, please, while we try this."

"The vestry!" snorted the bass. He was already on his feet and could not comply with her request, but he bounced where he stood like a human rubber ball. "The vestry! Men that can't sing a note! I see no use in paying any attention to what they say or do."

This summary dismissal of their pastors and masters because they could n't sing, must have struck Maida Crawford as very funny. She giggled aloud — and then tried to turn it into a cough. Somehow her hand came against Bill's. The two members clasped. He believed he squeezed her fingers. She felt as though they had been caught in a closing drawer, yet the rueful wince from her crushing rings had a thrill of triumph in it, too; a too youthful swain is often hardest to reach. Bill was young but

wary, and she had been making eyes at him on a long time.

"We won't discuss the matter," said the choir mistress in an awful voice. "Are you ever going to stand up? Maida Crawford, this is no place for levity."

The young person thus singled out, all eyes turned upon her, lost voice for reply, found herself too weak to rise. She leaned against Bill. He enjoyed that, since he saw William's glare of inquiry from the end of the soprano row.

"Maida!" ejaculated the directress, feeling that her command of the whole squirming mass was slipping, "you may leave the room until you can behave properly."

The girl made no movement to rise. She prolonged her moment of importance.

"How can I go?" she inquired, rounding big eyes of pretended innocence at Miss Bailey. "How can I, when the vestry has locked all the doors?"

It was a silly speech, the directress said something cutting in reply, which was lost in the half-subdued laughter that greeted it. Bill got to his feet.

"Come on," he whispered, still hanging to his neighbor's hand. "You 've started the whole push to snickering. There 's going to be an awful row. Let 's move."

He pulled her after him by the hand, not unwilling, and himself most pleased with the enterprise as he passed William, pallid, bereft, ready to cry out that his cousin was running away with stolen prop-

erty. The little door being locked, they stepped directly out upon the stone porch, where it was dark and cool. The night air made one too happy to laugh. They stood side by side in the dusk, drawn together in sudden warmth of intimacy by the inconsequent attractions of youth, high spirits, and propinquity. Bill felt come over him a strange sensation that proceeded from the readiness of the girl to receive that kiss he only vaguely thought of — her resolution that he should come out of his vagueness and offer it.

"Ain't I something awful?" she inquired softly, leaning close in the shadow. "When I get started that way, I just can't stop myself. What did you come with me for? Now if Miss Bailey expels me, she'll turn you out, too."

"Huh! They could n't keep me in the choir after they'd expelled you. It's all I come for — to sit by you," Bill found himself saying, without any particular volition of his own.

He spoke with boyish gruffness, yet there was that in his tone which made the girl catch his arm and pull him down beside her on the door-stone crying.

"Say, Bill, let's peek and see what they're doing."

She applied a bright eye to the keyhole.

"O-o-oh! she's got 'em all up, lecturing 'em. Well, she can't expel the whole choir."

"She needs us in her business," agreed Bill, kneeling beside the exile.

"My — just look!" cried the girl in a whispered

shriek, turning to him so swiftly that their heads almost bumped.

He could see her eyes shining in the twilight; her face was within a few inches of his own, a strand of hair blew across his lips. Suddenly he was aware of why he knelt there, why Maida knelt beside him, why indeed, the girl had made him kneel there. He leaned forward and kissed her — a boy's good, loud kiss.

"Oh!" she deprecated, without drawing away. "You must n't do that. Why — they 'll hear us in there! We must — be quieter. We 've got to go back right now. Somebody 's coming."

Bill took so much of her advice, that as they scrambled to their feet, he kissed her once more — "quieter."

The somebody who was coming proved to be Miss Bailey, reduced, as Bill had hoped she would be, to the paltry expedient of opening the door and asking them to return for the final chorals.

Again he sat beside Maida — again the hand dangled close to his own, but now he felt free of it. He caught it and squeezed it whenever he was disposed. This disposition came upon him at seasons when William was looking.

Whatever their elders did in the way of escorts and pairing off, the boys and girls of St. Jude's choir usually walked home in a bunch, those who had furthest to go swinging around past the near-by gates. Bill was by no means up to asking Maida if he could see her home, but she calmly cut him out from the others

by pretending to have lost her pencil just as they were crossing the church porch. William came officiously back and looked for it by the light of many matches. No doubt the janitor wondered at the number of burned stumps he found there in the morning. Maida grew a little thoughtful as she noted him dragging himself about on his knees in her service. He was taller than Bill — but a sudden gruff, "Aw, the others 're gettin' away — I 'm goin'," from Bill, set her running down the steps at the younger boy's side. William, the conscientious, searched for quite a little while after that, and walked home by himself. Maida hung back, pretended to have a gravel in her slipper, and took it off, leaning against Bill to do so, and finally the bunch was on ahead and they were alone together under the stars.

It was then she began bringing forth the litany, the ritual that she had so far accumulated for the subjugation of lovers. Did he ever think of her when he was away from her? She often thought of him.

Bill, not to be outdone, agreed in a rather bewildered tone that he thought about her sometimes. He hoped to goodness she would n't ask him what he thought.

"Will you think of me to-morrow?" Maida asked readily. "I will of you. We 're awfully good friends, now, are n't we, Billy?"

They were nearly to the Crawford gate. Bill felt with a sense of elation that he had pulled off a situation William longed for and was afraid to attempt.

"Course I 'll think of you to-morrow," he said largely.

"Would n't it be lovely for us to think of each other at the same time?" said Maida sentimentally, pausing in the gateway.

"I don't see how we 'd manage it," demurred practical Bill.

"Why, we might agree to think of each other once every hour, when the clock strikes. Promise that you will. I 'll do the same."

"Once an hour!" echoed Bill. "A fellow thinks of his best girl every minute, does n't he?" and then he wondered at his own exquisite adroitness.

Maida was searching in her pocket; she did n't give this question as much attention as it seemed to him to deserve.

"See here," she said, pulling out two bits of pasteboard with pencils attached to them by silken strings, and, as he saw in daylight, a line of figures down the front edge of each. "These are dance programs. I 'll keep this one with the pink pencil and give you the one with the little blue pencil to it. You must carry this with you everywhere you go and write down exactly what you think about me every time the clock strikes. Will you promise? Oh, do promise, Billy."

He was aware of her eyes in the dimness, of her hanging on the gate, little-girl-fashion, swaying with it.

"S'pose I don't happen to hear the clock strike?" he demanded, too honest to realize that he might crib sentimentalities as other fellows crib exams.

"Oh, well, you always know what time it is, don't you?" Maida tossed her ribboned braids, and made eyes at him under the tarnished light of the late moon.

"I reckon I do," agreed Bill, removing his cap to scratch a worried head. "What sort o' stuff do you want me to write on this?"

"What sort of stuff do you think about me, anyhow?" mimicked Maida, swimming in bliss.

"Why — that you're the prettiest, cutest, sweetest girl in town," asseverated Bill on sudden inspiration. He rather wished William could have heard that — maybe it would n't have doubled him up!

"Smarty!" The big eyes were swiftly veiled, there was a great fluttering of hair ribbons as the girl laughed at him. "I suppose you can write that down — if you can't make up anything more sensible."

"Will it do if I just write that down twelve times?" asked literal Bill doubtfully.

Would it do? Maida thought with gleeful anticipation of having such a card in her possession with Bill Harvey's name on it. Also she reasoned that once get him to do this, she had put the comether on him for keeps.

"It 'll do if you can't do any better," she pouted.

"Well," sighed her very youthful swain. He was oppressed by the job he had on hand. He felt that it was time to go, and that a boy who had kissed a girl at the beginning of the evening ought surely to kiss her good-night. "Well, I reckon I can do it," he agreed heavily. "But I 'd a heap rather say it to you."

Again Bill was astonished at his own adroitness. Such a speech as that would lead up grandly to the good-night kiss. Maida was really swinging on the gate to receive this, and Bill could n't for the life of him see why he did n't bestow it. As he hung in the wind there came a voice from an upper window.

"Maida! Maida Crawford! Is that you out there? Who 's with you?"

A shutter moved.

"Yes, mama," responded Maida in a dutiful, little-girl voice which Bill hardly recognized. "It 's only one of the boys from choir-practice. We walked up together."

"It 's late, children." Bill thought he saw a head behind the shutter. "I left a light in the hall, Maida. Don't fail to put the cat out so she can get to her kittens."

"Yes, mama."

Maida's voice fainted on the last word. She turned to see Bill rapidly disappearing down the street. She sighed. Well, here was the card in her hand and there was the card in his pocket — she would have something to show the other girls.

VII

HIS TOKEN

IT lacked but one week of the opening of school. Bill's father believed in keeping a boy employed, for at least a portion of his day, and during vacation Polly Bony's services were dispensed with. Bill was waked at six-thirty, to split that kindling he had forgotten the night before. This made him late about milking the cow. He was at that when the clock struck seven, but — well, there are no clocks in stables, and the dainty gilt-edged card with its dangling blue pencil remained sunk in oblivion, and in the hip-pocket of his trousers, past that fated hour.

There was a grudged fifteen minutes for breakfast, a hasty performance of the remaining chores, and then Bill's day was to begin with a dive in the river. There were whistlings and cat-calls in the alley, fingers raised in "the sign" above the back fence — and one pair of fingers was black.

"Now, look a-here, Poly Bony," Bill remonstrated, "you can't go with this bunch. It 's all right when there 's only me an' Newt Green an' Buster Crane, but we 've got William along this morning, and his mother says —"

Napoleon Bonaparte, taller by head and shoulders than Bill, swung away angrily.

"Neenter tell me what dat white 'ooman say," he remarked with dignity. "I 's good enough to teach you-all boys to pitch, an' I 's good enough to go swimmin' wid you and Newt — but ef I 's in de water wid Willum some o' de black might wash off on her little chiny lamb, I reckon. I des' soon go fishin'." And the strong, supple figure, with the single suspender upholding the no-colored trousers gallantly, slouched away toward a dug-out tied in the willows somewhere near the creek mouth.

"Now, he 's mad, and won't ever come and coach the ball team," said stubbed Newt Green.

"I wish mother was n't so particular," William regretted.

One of the first things Dr. Kirk had done was to insist that William's mother let him learn to swim. The doctor — he had been a boy himself — pointed out that it was not safe for youths who live on the banks of swimmable streams to be without this knowledge. The first time they took William out he approximated the attitude of the Boston boy who plunged into deep water, and when rescued, half drowned, by his indignant companions, announced that he felt secure because he had read up swimming in the encyclopedia. William still displayed more theory than practice.

"Poly Bony could teach him in two or three lessons," Bill lamented, and it was this suggestion which brought out the edict that William could not go swimming with the negro boy.

But nobody missed anybody else on such a morning as this, with the river waiting. Bill shoved his clothes off of his body as though each garment had been a personal enemy. In doing so the gilt edge of a white card was revealed to William's careful eye.

"Won't that get dirty?" he asked mildly.

"'Spect so," said Bill, flinging the trousers to the ground. "It's only a card that Maida Crawford gave me to write something on."

"Do you mind if I turn them over so it'll be on top?" William persisted. "It's right against the dirt there. You would n't want to hand it back — to her, dirty."

But Bill was far out on the raft, preparing to dive, and William conscientiously turned the garments over, letting the little gilt-edged white glimpse wink at the morning sun. He was desperately tempted to pull it from the pocket and see if anything had yet been written. He had it half-way out, discovered its blankness, and thrust it hastily back as there came a yell from his cousin.

"'Re you goin' in — 'r are — you — not? Get your duds off, Will-yum."

Oh, that cutting through the air with a lithe, sharp-boned body — the plunge into the clear waters, soft as velvet, and thrilling with liquid electricity! There was a babel by the riverside, so many shrill young voices in rapid vibration.

"Aw, 'fraid-cat, dive!"

"Juniper! See Bill go over!"

"Hurry up, Newt!"

"Aw, don't be so smart! I 'm a-comin'!"

"Whoop — look at William! Hey, William, quit threatenin'! Quit your fudgin', an' dive — *dive* — DIVE!"

They were running out over some logs lashed together by the shore, black, sullen old rafts in the gold of the morning sun. Their white bodies silhouetted against the green background for a breathless moment, then plunged down, down. A ripple on the river's face; the sun catches a wet head to burnish and ring with fire-circles; another, then another and another, rises on the stream, and all the fire-circles run together in broken gleams and flashes.

Bill tingled with enjoyment. Did a clock strike? Was there a clock in the world? If there was, could a boy take a program and blue pencil out of a pocket, when he had no pocket on? Hands above head, fingers extended and joined — one, two, three, over! Oh, the triumph of it! The boy-souls not comprehending why, they rioted so at surmounting natural laws — the land-animal living in water depths, and proud of the miracle!

They bantered one another to go further and further out on the raft crying, "It 's bully to dive where it 's real deep!"

Bill went ahead of them all, clearing the distance to the last raft in a splendid leap, and diving in swifter water. William, emulous, strong in some information he had recently gathered from a series of articles in "The Youth's Own Magazine of Manly Sports," hur-

ried after and, putting clumsy hands above his head, dived off the raft with inept heroism.

He did n't come up again. Bill, who always had a subjective eye on his cousin at such times, looked over a bare shoulder and divined at once what had happened — William had risen under the raft. Flinging himself backward, without a word, without a conscious thought, Bill was in the water again, curving upward, rising at the edge of the raft, grasping William's shoulder, clawing at his arm, dragging him to open water.

The taller boy rose spluttering and spouting, churning with his long legs. He was in that senseless state of panic that belongs to the body and comes to people who have n't used their muscles sufficiently to educate them to courage. As he scrambled up on the raft one foot shot out and struck Bill on the chin. Nobody noticed it, for the other boys were busy helping William on to the raft.

As for Bill, he went down before that kick, with a sensation of distinct annoyance. He came up awkwardly, there was a blow on his temple, his nostrils smarted and filled, his muscles slackened — lost their cunning. Like a weed awash he was sucked down. Somewhere at the back of his head, he understood what had happened. He had himself now risen beneath the raft. With such presence of mind as was left him, he flung up an arm as he rose again, his fingers came in contact with the sodden bottom of logs; he clutched desperately to free himself from the death-trap.

Going down once more, he came up again, further along the raft, played with by the current, helpless, all but senseless. He gave one last despairing push — the glow of all the suns in all the heavens was in his eyes — he was out from under the raft, but so exhausted he could not swim. His last conscious movement was to turn on his back and float. His last sensation was hearing the dip, dip of a paddle.

Poly Bony in his dug-out shot from the willows and came cutting through the water to his rescue. The strong young negro lifted the drowning boy into his unsteady shell without tipping it over. Then he jerked up a paddle and made for the raft.

"Heah — you-all boys," he hallooed hoarsely. "What y' 'bout? You let Marse Bill drown same as a dawg."

The boys ran screeching down to the raft edge. William felt himself in that moment a murderer. There rose a chorus of cries. "We thought he was all right! Where 'd you find him? Is it Bill — good old Bill?" William rounded up the chorus, "And he just saved my life!"

"Well you jump in heah an' do some 'n fer him, white boy," Poly Bony ordered grandly.

They jerked the hero ashore. His eyes remained obstinately shut. They got a keg and rolled him on it. They laid him on his back and would have set in to start his breathing but his eyes opened and he spoke in a voice weak but authoritative.

"Quit that. I 'm all right."

The boys stood about him in an awed circle.

"Shall I — had n't I better run for father?" asked William.

"Uh — uh, uk — guk, naw!" sputtered Bill. "What do I want of Uncle Doc? D' you boys forget we got a base ball-game up on the mountain this afternoon?"

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" roared Poly Bony, slapping his thigh. "Marse Bill ain't got no time to die — ner to be doctored out o' dyin'. He got ter play ball."

He turned and dropped into his dug-out, still chuckling.

William insisted on rubbing Bill down and helping him with his clothes. It was while they were doing this that the clocks in town struck nine. Had William known of the hourly arrangement he might have made a suggestion concerning the little card, which once more caught his wistful eye.

They were toiling up the red clay road to the mountain top where, in a small park, the ball-game was to be played, when the great courthouse clock struck ten. Bill could have heard that — you can hear the courthouse clock for a good many miles — but he did n't. He was hungry.

It was nearly eleven and they were resting at the summit when Poly Bony came up the road and Bill halted him for a minute's speech in regard to the ball-game. He was glad he did, too, for the black boy brought information.

"You see dem Gunter's Springs fellers dat you-all gwine play, dey 's scared o' you. Dat boy what wait on de table at de *ho*-tel, where dey stayin' at, say dey

lef' de reg'lar subs at home an' brung along two fellers dat 's played wid the profesh."

Bill pulled Poly Bony over to where the others were at that. He was manager of the team, but Newt was its captain and so must come into the council.

"You see what they 'll do," he prognosticated. "They 'll lame some of their weakest men right away and then ring in the professionals on us. We ain't got anybody's word for it but Poly Bony's, so we can't make a kick before the game. Gee! we can't put up any fight against that kind of a push."

"Those professionals must be a pretty low down pair," observed William. "No decent professional would let an amateur team run them in on a crowd half their size. I don't see what you can do, though."

"Say," broke out Bill, "they 've got to pay professionals. Men that have been bribed once can be bribed again."

"Yes — if we had the money," said Newt Green.

There was a heavy silence for a moment as the crowd of hot, dusty boys gazed at each other and thought of the coming conflict — jockeyed! It darkened the heavens. Then Bill spoke firmly, man-fashion.

"Father paid me off to-day for two months' chores — five dollars. I did intend — but — I 'll put up the mon'! We 'll send Poly Bony — nobody 'll suspect him — he can find the fellows and buy 'em off."

William regarded his cousin with awe.

"Gee! Good for you!"

"Say, Bill, you 're the stuff!" the boys whispered feelingly.

In taking the money from his pocket, Bill dropped out a white square with a blue pencil attached. As he did so, the clocks in the town below, had they been audible, might have been heard to strike eleven. The boy unconsciously put a broad sole on that dance program while he counted the price of victory into Napoleon's perspiring, pink and umber palm, pouring instructions, meanwhile, into his fellow conspirator's windmill ears.

"Don't forget to bring our suits," he finished. "No use going clear home just for dinner."

William had seen the desecrated card; he marked it when it fell; he shivered when Bill's boot pressed it and rescued it tenderly, dusting it with perhaps the cleanest handkerchief in that crowd. He dropped behind and held it in his hand. He had been too carefully brought up to quote to himself, "Finders is keepers," but something of the sort must have gone through his mind, for after studying his cousin's back two or three times, stealthily, he put the card in his own pocket.

The boys disposed themselves on a high, grassy swell rising from a gray bluff that jutted out over the valley, commanding river and town.

"My head feels funny," Bill announced meditatively. "I guess I 'll go and lay down in the shade there, where it 's cool. Maybe I 'll sleep a little. It kind o' feels that way."

He flung himself flat in the shadow of the boulder, his eyes on the far, blue distances, his thoughts with the coming struggle. His mouth felt hot. Even the

rock on which he lay was sun-warmed. He crawled further out, and stuck his head over the extreme edge. Perhaps if he stood up he could get a cooler breath. He rose and hung a moment, looking down. How far it was below to the heaving shoulders of green-clad trees, the bristling, sharp-toothed stones!

The boys saw him pitch forward. William leaped up, ran out on the rocks and looked down. Twenty feet below, he recognized a dark, motionless shape.

"Run — run!" he yelled to the others. "We got to go round and come back on the side. There's no way to get down here — only the way he went."

Bare-headed they forged through the stinging heat, gasping and sweating, but no red pumped to their pale faces. Over and over, in William's mind, went the terrible accusation — Bill had saved his life, and he had stolen the love token Maida gave!

Now they plunged over the slope, sliding, rolling, brambles tearing, vines tripping, low-swinging limbs whipping their smarting eyelids. Almost spent, they reached the bench, swerved to the right, crawled along a boulder — and met a boy in the narrow way!

"Hello, fellers!"

It was Bill in the flesh, limping, but coming on. "Anybody got a match? They all spilled out of me when I turned upside down going over the bluff." He fished out a pipe from his trousers pocket, and regarded its fractured stem ruefully. "I must have broke that, too, when I lit," he grumbled. "I barked my shin some."

Far away in the valley, whistles were blowing for

twelve o'clock. No doubt clocks were striking, also, and people were going home to dinner. But the dance program, with its little blue pencil, lay in William's pocket as far from Bill's stubby, earth-stained fingers, as from his boy's mind — all rude, male, Homeric activity — were the sweet nothings which should have been written on it at this hour. And when the model youth would have acknowledged his sin, somehow his lips were holden. He got all ready to speak but what he brought out was,

"Had n't we better stop by the drug store and get something for you, Bill?"

"Maybe we had better get some stickin' plaster for my head; it feels kind o' queer. Say, we got to buy some sandwiches at the park. I 'm as hungry as a hound dog. Who 's got the mon'?"

He had no desire to avoid a sensational episode. He was only too preoccupied with important things to stop and play hero. Otherwise, he might have remembered to pause and oblige his comrades with a dramatic moment or two.

"I ought to wash off this blood," he allowed. "Did n't I scratch my face up rolling down there? I rolled most of the way." He turned a battered countenance from one to another. "I 'm afraid, if my folks see me looking like this, they 'll take me out of the game, and some of 'em are sure to be there."

"Let 's go over to the creek," suggested Dinkey Martin. But when they arrived at the bank of the boulder-checked stream, controversy arose as to drying conveniences.

"Use your shirt, an' leave it hangin' on a limb — we 'll get it after the game," some one suggested. It was not William but Bill, the boy who had twice in one morning pulled the whiskers of death, that put up a really serious objection to this.

"I 'd forget and go home without it, and then ma 'd miss it and scold. I can stand most things, but ma's scolding gets me. I 'll dry on my shirt, and put it back on. It 'll feel nice and cool."

It was in the dressing and undressing, when William's hand came in contact with the card that he felt most poignantly his wickedness in not returning it. It was then also that he noted the line of figures down the front. He asked Bill about this, timidly.

"Was n't there a row of numbers on the front edge of that card Maida Crawford gave you?"

"Yep," said Bill negligently. He was where he could glance up at the clock in the restaurant and he noted that it was n't an even hour.

"Were they — did they stand for anything important?" William asked.

"Nothin' much," Bill grinned reminiscently. "I was to think about her every hour in the day and write down what I thought."

"There were twelve, were n't there?" prompted William.

"Yep; number one stood for seven o'clock 'cause I told her I got up then. It wound up at six 'cause we 'll be goin' to practice again then, and I 'll give it to her. Gee, ain't these sandwiches little?"

One o'clock at the park found stragglers beginning

to gather for the two o'clock game, and the Wataugas finishing lunch. As they passed through the gate, they saw Lynette and Alan Starr paying their way in. No doubt the children had run away to attend the ball-game; plainly their reason for doing so was that more or less unwelcome adoration they both entertained for Bill.

That worthy was just finishing the last of his ponderous sandwiches, when he pronounced himself fit, lined up his men and prepared for battle. Two o'clock came and with it the familiar, "Play ball!"

The visitors anxious for a chance to bring in the professionals they had secured, put forward their weakest players. In the first inning the Watauga boys made a home run. It looked like easy victory; but neither Bill nor Newt was deceived. They believed that the Gunters felt willing not to score until they could bring in their hired professional talent. And, sure enough, at a signal from the manager, one of their players felt his shin, groaned, and limped off the field. There was a call for a substitute, two calls, a fusillade of cat-calls, tiger-yells, the howl of the jungle wolf, for that substitute — for any substitute. But none was forthcoming!

Instead, a note was put in the hands of the Gunter's Springs captain. In it the professionals informed him that conscience had at the last minute seized them, as it were, by the throat, and dragged them out of the way of temptation. They reminded him that it is not all of glory to win, that honesty and fair play are the

best part of any game. They added that conscience-smitten, they had withdrawn from the grounds and were leaving for Nashville on the next train, but neglected to mention that their noble action and fine sentiments had cost the manager of the Wataugas five dollars.

The lame player recovered miraculously, and drifted back to his base, wearing a sheepish grin. The Gunters had deliberately lost ground. With the courage of despair, their captain now came to the bat. He looked his men over; they understood that, having failed at treachery, they were expected to do the impossible — and they meant to try.

One home run for the visiting team in the third inning.

"We're beat — we're beat right now!" groaned Newt, as Bill came out. William, on the substitute benches, prayed a bit, half in doubt as to whether heaven ought to be troubled about a ball-game, but following life-long habit.

The manager of the home team ground his teeth. A strip of plaster running the length of his forehead, bramble scratches swelling on his sun-blistered face, he dropped the end of his bat to earth and glared defiance. Somewhere a clock struck three — but not in that world which his spirit now inhabited.

What need to tell the details of the boyish struggle, heat palpitating in the air, the sun blazing down pitilessly upon the dry, baked diamond with the cinder-lines? Suffice it to say that in the ninth inning, after pulling forward and back, the score stood seven to

seven. Bill was again at the bat, the captain of the Gunters in the pitcher's stand.

"Look out for him, Bill!" Newt whispered the warning. "That fellow can knock spots out of anybody with a ball."

"He ain't a-goin' to knock no spots out of me," Bill muttered from the pit of his stomach.

The first ball came. Bill clutched his bat hard, lest it go off automatically with all the fury of combat which he felt running down his arms. But that ball! It was an impossibility — such curves the treacherous Gunterite threw! Bill had tested his bat; he spat on his hands, squared his legs, glowered at the umpire, swung the bat on high, and struck — air.

"Strike, one!"

It seemed to the boy, for the moment, that those swallow-dipping balls had been flying over his head for years. Then he summoned back the confidence with which he had begun. His appearance was surely enough to scare one of those invisible-rope-walking spheres into falling at his feet. One was coming now. He fanned the air like a windmill.

"Strike, two!"

The captain of the Gunters grinned, triumphant. He, too, stood with legs apart and glared like an Indian on the war-path. He tasted salt sweat in his open mouth, and forgot to wipe it off. Blood was in his eye, the scent of glory in his nostrils. It needed but one more. He gave a last upward sweep, and delivered a beautiful rising-and-falling ball.

Newt, despairing on the edge of the game, dragged

up voice enough to shout with the full force of his lungs.

"Get 'er, Bill! Hit it or bust!"

Bill forgot his professional scowl. He cocked an eye of agonized endeavor on the falling speck, poised his bat in fingers that felt it not at all, make a stroke which seemed to him the wave of a feather — and hit the ball with a crack that was heard outside the fences. It was a straight-liner, passing over the heads of the second base and center-field. The home team and its friends yelled for all they were worth.

"Go it Bill!"

"Hooray for Bill Harvey!"

"Look out for 'em! Run! Look out for 'em!"

"Shake yer feet, Marse Bill, shake yer feet!"

Like a thing without feeling or weariness of the flesh, like a mechanical toy running swiftly between the hot earth and the blazing sky, Bill responded. He was not running because they urged him, but because he must.

The outfield of the Gunters has the ball in his hands. He is throwing it to the captain in the box.

The cries burst into wilder notes. Perhaps William is praying aloud. If he is nobody notes it.

Is this tireless runner whom they cheer on, the boy who broke his head on the river raft this morning, to be dragged from the water half drowned — who fell off the bluff — who has walked ten dusty miles?

The captain of the Gunters has the ball at last, and is sending it red-hot over the home-plate.

The Wataugas are yelling deliriously. They can

scarcely withhold their legs from running with him. As he passes the bleachers, something that is not merely his hearing — his soul perhaps — is aware of a childish voice seldom raised, but now shouting,

"You can — William — you can do it."

How does he know that he is William to Lynette Starr? He does n't know it then. All he hears is,

"Hit her up, Bill!"

"Yah! Ye 're beat, Gunters! You 're beat!"

"Come on! Come on!"

"Slide! *Slide!* Gol durn it, SLIDE!"

And he does slide over the tearing cinders with one forearm under him and a cheek that gets a dab now and then. Gasping, grunting, streaming with sweat, he slides almost twice his own length. Stretching flat out, his abraded finger-ends meet the home base — they touch victory for Watauga!

That night, as a tired boy very tenderly peeled a damp shirt from blistered shoulders, his mother, on her way to the kitchen to reinforce a new cook's precarious efforts, tossed in at his door a delicately scented, pink-tinted envelope.

With the one sleeve he had worked loose pulled over his head and held gingerly in cautious fingers, Bill opened the note by means of his teeth and left hand, and read the following:

DEAR BILLY:—

Was n't it fine our team won! Did you think of me every minute while you were playing? I shall never forget our walk home last night. Bring your program

to the practice this evening and let 's exchange. Mine is full.

MAIDA.

As he struggled through this communication, Bill's jaw gradually fell. Moved by some vague memory of the muscles alone, his hand went to his trousers pocket in which card and pencil had been stowed.

Last night! Empires had risen and been cast down since then; dynasties had come into power and suffered decay. His mind groped helplessly for the mood which belonged with that program as his hand explored the pocket which had contained it. Poor Bill! He was as sincere in his Bill-ness as ever his cousin was in the William-ness that informed that commendable youth's conduct. What had he intended to write? What would William have written? His brain refused to focus on this point. Then, as he sorted and shuffled phrases in his mind, tender expressions that should satisfy a waiting recipient, as he wondered whether affinity was spelled with two fs, he had a sudden outreach toward his cousin. He wished he had spoken to William more fully of the matter.

He had discovered that the card was gone, when his mother passed the bedroom door again, looked down into the hall and called back,

"Bill — William 's waiting for you to go to choir practice."

He jerked his tie into place and hit his hair with the brush, grabbed his cap and was half-way down the stairs as his mother had reached their foot and

passed into the sitting-room. William stood in the dim hall with the look of a conscious martyr in his eye.

"I — you — this is for you," he said, as he shoved something into Bill's hand.

It was a dance program; a little blue pencil dangled from it, held by a silken cord with a fuzzy tassel. Moreover, it was as white as when it left Maida's fingers.

"I cleaned it all up, with a velvet rubber," William said, huskily. "You dropped it in the road and stepped on it." He spoke as one who recounts cruelties done upon helpless babes.

Bill noted now that the little blue pencil had been busy. The card was filled out. The writing was not William's usual neat script; indeed it looked singularly like Bill's own chirography.

"I 've — I tried to write as much like you as I could and — you see —"

Bill took the program under the hall light and "saw." It was filled out, not by the repetition of one doubtfully satisfactory phrase, but with the most elegant and pleasing variations on the theme of love — at fourteen years. At the head of the column it said,

"What William Harvey the Third thinks of Maida Crawford every hour in the day."

Bill glanced at William a moment.

"But you — this is you," he said, laying a blunt forefinger on the name. "You goin' to give it to her? You got a right to. I lost it."

"You saved my life" — William had insisted on

that very tiresomely all day —" and you 're my cousin. That 's — that 's your name, too. Of course you 'd want to write it in full on a — on a love-token like that."

He said the word right out and both boys blushed, a queer feeling like the opening sensation of a high dive going over Bill.

" In full, nothin'," he said, puzzled by the generosity of the other, but determined not to be outdone. " Wait a minute." He grabbed the tiny pencil with the fuzzy tassel, moistened it — the things never want to write — and attacked the card in a way that made William shiver. " See here — this 'll fix it. We 'll both give it to her."

When he was done the revised headline read:

" What William and Bill Harvey the Third thinks of Maida Crawford every hour in the day "— the Bill being explosively put in with a caret.

VIII

HIS LIBERTY

IT was the night of the concert that Bill heard the first authoritative word spoken concerning the danger of yellow fever reaching Watauga. Up to that time everybody had maintained that their altitude made them safe, and even if brought in the fever would not spread. For this reason the quarantine was lax. A family claiming to be from an uninfected neighborhood entered with their household goods, rented a cottage in the Third Ward where the low ground had been filled in and Dr. Kirk had always more cases of contagious disease than anywhere else. These people died, one after the other, of what the doctors called " pernicious malarial fever." When the negress who washed for them was taken with a similar complaint, and Poly Bony, who had been lodging at her house, was down with it, there began to be a wide-spread scare.

The board of health redoubled its activities. The town was cleaned like the house of a woman who expects guests, back yards that held the filth of years were made sanitary, little trails of lime spread everywhere in whitening lines by fences and ditches. And the guests came. One after another, from house to

house, the fever crept in that low ground, until the authorities were obliged to declare it epidemic. The people rose and fled with their goods and their children until, the railroad refusing, they could flee no more, and were forced to establish themselves in frightened camps in the woods upon the mountainsides, where an alienated peasantry warned them off from all supplies with shot guns.

James Harvey, editor of Watauga's morning paper, elected to stay. The paper, he said, was the voice of the town, its one and only appeal to the unstricken world outside, and if he failed to send that voice forth they would be deserted by such helpers as now sent supplies to them. So he worked in the office as long as it was not in the infected district, and then moved to the deserted shop of the evening paper where he and an old tramp printer, who had drifted into town just before the quarantine became operative, got out a pitiful little sheet, printed at last on brown wrapping paper, giving the list of new cases, of the dead, news of supplies received, supplies needed, physicians in charge, means that were being used. Bill was proud of his father.

The Rector of St. Jude's, an old man and frail, whose family and friends tried to keep him out of the most dangerous places, steadily refused to seek safety. The last public services permitted to be held in town were in St. Jude's. After that, there was no funeral, no church. Bill went that time, and his mother was the only woman in the edifice, while his father was the only man who was not a preacher. The six other

preachers of the town made up the congregation, and after reading the service, William the First told them that the Board of Health had ordered all the churches closed, and that they would not meet thus again until the danger had passed by. Something solemn and beautiful brushed the boy in that service, but he was too young to get from it what William might have done. He was more interested in his Uncle Doc, and the partner that had recently been taken into the office. It was nobody but Jimmy Crane, if you came down to that, and Jimmy Crane was Buster Crane's brother — he need n't think Bill would call him Dr. Crane, just because the other folks pretended to.

As for the fever, people that you knew did n't die of it. Look at Poly Bony, he was not only well again, but he was an immune, a creature bearing a charmed life, who could go anywhere or do anything he chose.

Ruth Harvey stayed with her husband to the last — and Bill stayed with them both. But William and Aunt Amelia had been authoritatively removed by Dr. Kirk and placed in safety long before the quarantine shut down. The doctor sent his wife cheerful letters which she was instructed to fumigate thoroughly before reading, though, of course, the mails of Watauga were fumigated in the post offices.

Existence settled down to a fascinating round. The Harvey house on Maple Street was in a good quarter of town. Drs. Kirk and Crane were soon so desperately overworked that one never saw them any

more than as if they were in one of the refugee camps where William and his mother were.

"More people are scared to death than die of the plague any year," James Harvey used to say at the breakfast table. "The authorities 'll soon have this under control."

Bill took the encouragement to heart. Who was scared? Not he. His mother seemed anxious, but not in terror; she tried to use reasonable caution and yet not defeat her own ends by senseless fear. And Bill found large experience and untried fields of activity in this altered Watauga, this hushed, trembling town, where most of the better houses were closed and shuttered, where gardens bloomed and orchards ripened their fruit unheeded save by some straying animal that might push open a nailed-up gate and venture in. A new and interesting sensation was the delicious shiver of the infected district, with its gay little yellow flags, where he was forbidden to go. There was a fearful delight in scudding past the shut houses of the prohibited precinct, and telling mother when you got home that you "never knew Chestnut Street was in it — till you was right in front of Zack Elder's folks' cabin — and then did n't you run!"

"Where are you going now, Bill?" his mother had called after him that morning, anxious, yet always tolerant and comradely.

"Play-ball-'th-Al-Starr," he gave her back in one word.

"Are those people still in the Beecham place?" Mrs. Harvey came a little way down the walk to ask.

"Yep." Bill supplied the information with a frank lack of interest. "They sleep nights up there, but Mother Missouri 's got what she calls a headquarters down in the infected district. She 's praying against the fever."

"And those children with her? Billy — Billy — did you say Miss Starr had those two children with her in the infected district?"

Ruth intended to report this to her husband or Dr. Kirk — she would even appeal to the Rector. Bill saw in her inquisition only a menace to his intimacy with the last playmate left him.

"Naw — I guess not," he said comfortably. "She just goes down to headquarters and preaches and prays, but she makes Al and the girl stay up at the house most of the time."

The Beecham place was on a bluff overlooking the river. Ruth Harvey felt it to be as safe from infection as her own home. Relieved, she went back into the house, only stopping a moment to call after her boy.

"Well, be careful about that infected district to-day. Don't you come home and tell me again that you forgot, Bill. We don't dare forget in fever times."

"All-right — all-right," Bill grinned excessively.

His one anxiety was that his mother's zeal should not deprive him of Alan Starr's companionship. Al was trusted to his own devices. Being the only pal to be found, he was in Bill's eyes the best, and correspondingly precious. The two had dropped into a daily intimacy that might once have seemed strange.

Nothing was strange here and now where everything was topsy-turvy, unreal. To reach Alan he went a round-about way by Tarver's drug store.

"Hello, Pills-'n-bones, would y' give a feller a licorice?" he inquired buoyantly, poking his head in as he passed.

Brent Tarver's father glanced up from the quinine capsules he was filling.

"My hand would make it taste bad — help yourself, Bill," he said in that odd, listless, hushed tone people get in a pestilence-swept town.

Cap on ear, the boy flashed in and out again, only nodding and grinning his thanks. The tired eyes followed him a bit refreshed.

"In Dixie land I 'll take my stand; away down South in Dixie," he howled — it could scarcely be termed singing — the words all running together in a trail of rollicking sound as he ambled along the street, sucking his licorice. William could have sung it much better, but William was safe with his mother on mountain heights, many miles away.

The driver of the dead wagon turned his head to see who had the heart to sing in Watauga that day.

"Hey, Poly Bony — gimme a ride," Bill bantered him conversationally.

"You ain't gwine wait long foh yo' turn. Ef you sings dat erway somebod' gwine mek you fitten foh my load, suah," returned the negro shaking his head with grim humor. He flicked an ineffectual whip lash in Bill's direction.

"That 's the only song I know — and I don't know

that right good; they would n't let me practise at choir rehearsal," shouted Bill.

Poly Bony clucked to his old horse and turned a corner.

"Hoo — ee — hoo-ee — oo-eeooo — oee," Bill yodled, cupped hands to his lips to make the sound carry. A cheerful voice in such a spot roused the attention of the sallow, tired-eyed policeman.

"Lord, it 's Bill Harvey," he muttered, as one who scants even to wonder greatly over a matter admittedly beyond his depth. "Lord — that Bill!"

Dr. Kirk, jogging along behind his brown horse, a heroic figure to be recalled in after-time through memory's grateful tears, heard a sharp between-the-teeth whistle and a shrill yell, "Cut behind — Uncle Doc!"

He glanced back over the sagging buggy into the red-brown eyes.

"Bill," he reproved, almost mechanically, "you ought to go right home and stay with your mother. A town like this is no place for a chap of your size to be round loose in."

"'Fraid I 'll get some sure 'nough tuber-closes, Uncle Doc?" Bill inquired.

The doctor frowned. What were the Harveys thinking of to keep him here? Yet as the lad dropped off and began to race over the hot, velvety dust with happy, bare feet, he sent after him a wistful glance — the one specimen of natural, joyous human depravity to be encountered in a mournful morning's round.

Bill was on his way to the Crawford garden —

such a garden! It had been Mr. Crawford's hobby; it ran down the side of a whole block, village fashion. Magnolias richly shaded it, roses rioted everywhere; pears, big, sweet, luscious, dropped and rotted in the grass because no boy came to eat them; peaches, golden-hearted, grapes with the sunny beauty of far-away France in their purple curve — all going to waste unless Bill climbed the hill and scrambled over the locked gate. The family had fled to Gunter's Springs. At that gate Alan Starr was waiting for him. They flew at each other, when Bill came up, like gladiators, and closing in a bear-hug on the wall-top went rolling into the miniature paradise together.

"Quit now," Alan cried fretfully, as Bill hammered him in mere friendliness. "I 've had about enough of that. You stop, Bill Harvey. Aw, stop it now, I say."

It was the nearest to irritation that this boy had ever come towards Bill. He had found no friend nor chum in Watauga save this champion who had defended himself and Lynette, and now was his one companion during the fever-smitten days.

Bill forebore, in surprise, stared at his companion a moment, then subsided among lavishly piled heaps of fruit and bloom, and stretching on his back, began to gorge and discuss the day's program. The resources for entertainment before the two boys were unlimited. In a sense the town was all their own; they might choose one garden or another to loll and feast in; they might play ball (though none of their mates were within hail) in the square itself without reproof dur-

ing these halcyon, terrible times, and Bill had taken to coaching Alan in the Sacred Science, promising him a place on the school team next fall, if he responded to the merciless exactions of his self-elected master.

"Nothing tastes just right 'cept the grapes," Alan complained. And again Bill stared at him. Full to the teeth, his gusto had not flagged.

"The Crawfords left their croquet set on the back porch," the Starr boy offered the information to divert attention from his lack of appetite. "Let 's go get it and set it up and play."

"Naw, I don't want to play girls' games," Bill objected. "If you don't want to practise that inshoot I was showin' you, nor sprint some — y' got to know how to run to be any use on a baseball team — let 's mosey round to Emmon's shooting gallery. It 's in the infected district and nobody 'll disturb us. I found a way to get in the back window — better 'n that side door they nailed up yesterday. Poly Bony knows how to get in everywhere — he has to, now he 's drivin' the dead wagon."

"Those blamed guns have n't been cleaned since it was shut up, and they kick," Alan rubbed his shoulder reminiscently. "I believe those guns kicking that way is what makes me ache so all over to-day."

Now indeed Bill examined his companion with astonishment and regret.

"Are n't you even going swimming?" he asked, as though that were the limit of futile self-denial. The long afternoon swim was the never-failing finish to each twenty-four hours of their companionship.

"Well, let's don't go until after sundown," Alan returned with unusual caution. "I'm awful hot, but somehow I don't want to go in the water. Grandmother says it gives you rheumatism to catch cold. I don't see why you could n't pray that away, same as the fever, though. I don't want to go in the water right now, anyhow."

Bill, who took no interest in the weather, rolled on his side, hauled two battered dice (the property of Poly Bony) from his pocket and proposed craps with pigeons for stakes — each boy had a cooing loftful.

"Lynnie won't let any of 'em go," her brother remarked fretfully. "She knows every one of 'em by name. They 'll fly to her even when I have a hatful of corn."

They set to playing but Alan scarcely roused to "seven come eleven." He only began presently to show a certain febrile anger each time he lost, and finally struck a glancing blow at the other boy, crying, "You cheated — you know you did, Bill Harvey — you cheated then!"

Bill dodged automatically, too amazed to do more than throw up a hand to ward the stroke.

"What's the matter with you?" he inquired. "You know I don't cheat."

They called each other names — the worst they could think of — and they wrestled and fought like a couple of bear cubs; but somewhere along the line real rage flared up and veritable accusation was voiced. Bill stared back at his companion with eyes in which anger grew.

"Look here," he remarked gruffly, getting to his feet, "I 'll not associate with you any more. My grandfather never liked it anyhow. You know well enough William and none of the boys but me would be seen with you. I 'm going right in that house now. You can stay here or hike out — or do what you please, for all of me."

He turned his back expecting to be followed. There was neither detaining hand upon his shoulder nor coaxing, apologetic voice at his ear, as he swung to the water spout and shinned up toward a chamber window which his sharp eyes had noted was unfastened. Leg over sill, he hesitated. It was not like Alan to do that way. The boy sat humped, arms about knees, just where Bill had left him.

"If you want to come in, Al, I 'll go down and open the back door," Bill called stiffly.

Alan made no answer. He did not even turn his head. But from within there came an unexpected response, tones that rose hollow in the empty house and called,

"Hello there! Is anybody upstairs? Don't come closer — there 's fever here."

Bill scrambled across the sill instantly. He ran into the hall and peeped over the banisters. Below him, swimming like a drowned face in the well of shadows, Dr. Kirk's countenance stared up. The boy twiddled a friendly thumb against his nose — not in derision, but as a signal of his defiance of yellow fever germs.

"Say, Uncle Doc, you sawing up somebody down

there?" he put it briskly. "Lemme hold your knives and sharpen 'em for you if you are."

"Bill Harvey — my God!" exclaimed Kirk, and the boy could see him gripping the newel. "Go back! I 've got the fever!"

That was foolish of Uncle Doc to think he could be scared like William.

"D' you want a building-up treatment?" piped the mischievous voice from above.

It was an old jest between them, but it failed to bring any smile to the doctor's weary eyes and tense lips. Bill's face changed a little. The fever was only a vast, rude playfellow that turned the town upside down and made it full of alluring novelty for him. But if Uncle Doc was sick that was different.

"Bill," went on the voice from the foot of the stairs, "you 've been exposed already. I 'm going to make use of you to send a message to Crane. You tell him I came up here to the Crawford house to get some things, and I was taken pretty bad. Tell him after he 's been his rounds — *after,* do you hear, Bill Harvey? I 'll give you five dollars if you 'll do exactly what I say; and the worst whipping you ever had if you run to him right away, or tell anybody else."

"Yep," Bill spoke up with renewed cheerfulness. Doctors never died of fever. "But I ain't doin' it for money, Uncle Doc. Money 's no good in this dead-and-alive, kill-'em-and-drag-'em-out town any more."

"Mind — you must n't tell your mother, or any of the folks at home — they 'd send Amelia word," the

hollow voice repeated. "I 'm all right, if you just tell Jimmy Crane and nobody else — and tell him after his rounds."

There was a sound of soft scraping down the rain pipe, then a thud of bare feet that struck the grass outside and ran swiftly along the yard. Alan Starr still sat where he had been left. Bill hung a moment on his heel, then turned and pitched himself down beside the other boy, announcing indifferently,

"I got an errand to do, Al. There 's somebody in the house there. Want to come along?"

"My head aches," groaned Alan apparently forgetting that they had parted in anger. "I can't go. My mouth feels all mossy inside. Say, Bill, I believe I 'll wait here till you get back."

It came dimly to Bill that the boy ought not to lie there in the yard if there was a fever case in the house.

"Come on," he urged, "don't be such a mama's baby. Your head did n't ache enough to keep you from punchin' me awhile ago."

"Aw, now, Bill, my head does ache."

But the boy got to his feet and draggingly followed his companion.

IX

HIS LIFE

HEY had hard work finding the young doctor. It was hot, and Bill would have gotten rid of his companion, had not the bull-dog instinct of pertinacity been aroused. At last they saw Crane driving slowly down a side street.

"You, Bill Harvey," Doctor Jimmy Crane grumbled as the boy unceremoniously climbed over the back of his buggy, "some day you 'll be killed, swinging on to vehicles that way, or have a limb torn off, like a fellow I heard of once."

"Limb?" grinned Bill. "Reckon anybody that 's got limbs can sprout new ones if they get torn off. Are y' done y'r calls? If y' are, Uncle Doc told me to tell you —"

"What about Dr. Kirk?" Crane prompted impatiently.

These were times of dread, and a message from your nearest friend might mean calamity; but Bill was not listening. He had turned his head and was looking back to where Alan Starr lay by the side of the road.

"That 's funny," he muttered. "Did he fall down — or just lay down and go to sleep? He kept a-sayin' his head ached. Come back here and have a look at him," he added authoritatively to Dr. Crane.

Doctor Jimmy turned his buggy and drove to the prostrate lad. Alan was breathing heavily; his face was scarlet, his eyes closed.

"He 's got the fever," said the young doctor.

"He ain't!" flared Bill indignantly — why these student doctors would just kill you with words! "Him an' me 's been playing all day, and I guess he — I guess he played too hard," he finished on a falling note, remembering how curiously Alan had behaved.

"Well, you 've been exposed to it, then," said Crane in that apathetic tone the druggist had used. "You might just as well take hold and help me with him. But if you 're afraid, you can get in the rig and go to headquarters for help."

Bill looked sovereign contempt at the man who could suppose he needed any urging not to desert a chum just because somebody said he had the fever.

Crane's horse pulled out to the side of the walk and began cropping the bit of grass. Bill and the doctor lifted Alan and got him to the little cottage mission of the Mother Missourians. A rudely scrawled symbol on the door advertised the place. It was empty.

"She 's moved it out of the infected district," said Bill. "Alan told me they were all at her to."

"Put him on this bed," said the doctor without heat or surprise. "I 've got to go on and leave him. Will you stay with him till some of them come? You can't be any more exposed than you have been. Will you do it, Bill?"

Bill had less opinion than ever of Jimmy Crane. Call that a doctor! — call it even a man!

"Gwan," he said briefly. "Some of 'em will be in here pretty soon."

The young physician stopped a moment to see if it were worth while to leave instructions or medicine. Plainly this boy had carried the fever in his system for long; to-day was properly well advanced in its sequence of terrors. Crane recognized the type of case; he knew that he was too late.

"I 've got other patients along this street. I may as well go on," he said wearily. "There 's nothing here I can do."

"No, you don't!" At the threshold Bill stopped him with blazing eyes. "You give Al something out of your satchel. You ain't much of a doctor, but I reckon you know what Uncle Doc would give him if he was here."

Even the heavy stoicism of those terrible days was stirred by the bald insolence of the speech. Dr. Crane hesitated between indignation and astonishment. As he opened his mouth for a sharp reply, the boy on the bed unclosed his eyes and recognized his chum.

"It 's awful hot here, Bill," he moaned, "but I 'm pitchin' the best I can."

Bill ran to the bedside and clutched the covers, staring down incredulously.

"Sure you 're pitchin' good," he quavered at last. "And Jimmy Crane 's going to help you. You do what he says, Al."

He looked imploringly at the young physician, in

those red-brown eyes of his the dumb apology and appeal one sees in the eyes of a dog which has offended. Crane stepped to the bed foot. It was no use to dose the dying boy. The fever was killing him with its first onslaught — he would be likely to go in this congestion where the brain is attacked.

"I 'll find his grandmother — I think she 's in this neighborhood," Crane said.

The queer, twisted pathos of the thing, so very real and yet so strangely obscured by the survival of Bill's every-day manner of cheerful impudence, took him by the throat.

"I hit it, Bill," whispered Alan, gazing up into the other boy's face. "You said I could n't, but I did. Now I got to run. Golly! I hit it so hard I can make a home run. A — home — run — Bill!"

The whispering voice trailed off into silence, the eyes closed.

"I must tend to my calls, Bill," Crane said softly. "Remember there are plenty of other people sick just that way in this town to-day — and dying too. I 'll come back."

Bill held his head down and suffered the young man to go. He could not let anybody see his face just then. Once Doctor Jimmy was away he brought his whole resolute young soul to caring for the sick boy. The few noises from the silent street went unheard. He forgot that nobody at home knew where he was. The sunlight from the western windows crept across the bare floor as he labored ignorantly, devotedly. Through long hours he kept the covers over Alan.

"They tell me that 's the great thing," he repeated distressfully, "to keep 'em covered up."

Toward mid-afternoon, a shadow darkened the doorway, a tall old woman with streaming hair, barefooted, carrying a long staff, was glancing from the face on the pillow to the boy by the bed. It was plain she had got Jimmy Crane's message at last. She came forward haltingly, looked again at what she must have known was the end of the young life she had taken into her charge. What communion she held with her own soul in that moment God knows; but it shattered finally the bitter pride in her — that last of all vanities, spiritual arrogance, the pride that apes humility. When Missouri Starr broke, it was as though iron gave way. The clashing fragments of her emotional storm hummed past Bill's consciousness discordantly. It jarred all through him in a dull way, and he wondered why he cared.

"Don't cry," he found himself saying over and over. "Don't cry. I 'll make it all right. I 'll fix it, Mrs. Missouri. Don't cry."

She looked at the dead boy on the bed, at the valiant figure of his caretaker. It was plain that a sudden sense of the futility of her life swept over her. Bill remembered her standing in the middle of the room. Her voice reached him as though she had whispered, like a spent wave that breaks on a far shore.

"They would n't come," she said, and her tears were all at once dried. "They knew of it well enough — long before the doctor told me — but they would n't come. They planned to keep it from me. I 've fed

them with the bread of life and clothed them with righteousness — and this is what they have done to me. I gave them your portion, Alan —" she appealed with a stiff gesture that sent a shiver over Bill to the figure on the bed. "I gave them your portion — and now there is n't one of them that will bring a clean sheet to roll you in, none help me wash you for the grave."

Again she wept, sending out little jerking exclamations, curiously mingled Scriptural phrases and appeals to Bill to make poor Alan seemly for his last bed. Bill dug up from his experience of older women a bit of comfort for her.

"I 'll get clean things," he said huskily, "and then we 'll wash him."

He knew now, vaguely, that Alan was dead. Certainly, they washed dead people — and Alan was dead. Women had queer notions about that washing business, and it usually pleased them to have you fall in with their ideas. He had always thought it a pity that, under the circumstances, they seemed to have such a horror of water where it could be had in quantity — in the river. This struck him as inconsistent. However, he was tolerant of a weakness shared by his mother. And then he remembered suddenly, with a sense of blindness and a swelling in his throat that he and Al had n't gone swimming that day — and why.

The kneeling woman made no sign, Bill rose heavily, took the bucket and started out the side way. A group of women were huddled at a well in a vacant lot

next door, where the water supply for that neighborhood was got. As Bill saw them he turned methodically back, and, going to the front door, tore in two the yellow flag that Dr. Crane had hung there, carried the strip with him and pinned it by the blade of his jack-knife upon the jamb of the side entrance. When he looked up from that task the women were gone. Only a white, frightened face peered over a tall fence and vanished. He brought water from the well and filled the basin, searching out cloths and towels.

"Now, do the best you can," he encouraged the rigid, kneeling woman, as he might have spoken to a member of his ball team. "If you think you can 'tend to it alone, I 'll pike out after some clean clothes — for him."

"I washed him when he was a baby," said Mother Missouri, gathering composure. "Poor child — when he was a baby. Will you come back?"

Bill nodded silently. He saw that she was not going to work, and with capable hands he began folding the sheet down, rolling the quiet form over upon the bare mattress, then with a strange, hesitating, bewildered look at Alan, took up the basin and cloths and put them into Mother Missouri's hands.

"I 'll be back in a minute with the things," he said confidently.

When he emerged into the sunshine again, he found Elm Street looking somehow queer, like a painted picture of a street. It was nearly four o'clock, but he had n't once thought of dinner or mother at home, wondering why he did n't come. Winsdale's store

was down near the corner of Elm and Fifth. He made short work of skirting the alley, climbing the rear fence and breaking into an ill-fastened back window. He had bought things for his mother at that store all his life; he and Ted Winsdale had played all over it. He knew where everything was kept. He helped himself to a pair of sheets, showing judgment in the selection; also a boy's white night-shirt, the best he could find. He was about to climb out of the rear window when his eye fell on the face of a little girl gazing at him wonderingly.

"Gee!" he muttered, "reckon I 've got the fever now."

"Is that you in there?" inquired Lynette's soft little voice. "I 'm so glad it 's you. I 'm hunting for Alan."

Bill drew back clutching the sheets and the night-shirt, rolling them tighter as though they might tell something to the child. He must get her away. Boys and men had to face yellow fever or anything else that came. It was n't heroism, it was merely the way of things. But girls, and your mother, should be kept safe. He was silent for so long that the child spoke again.

"Are — are you coming out now?"

"Go 'way," he said in a prefectly inoffensive tone, backing off from the window. "I — I 've been where the fever is. You go right home."

"Yes," she wavered, "I will in a minute. But I 've got to find Alan. Grandmother left me with Mrs. Sivley — and Mrs. Sivley ran away. I 'm

afraid all alone up there. I want Alan to come back. Have you seen him?"

In the shock of that query Bill dropped his bundle. His distracted glance traveled around the dim store and lighted upon a smiling wax doll, brave in its pink silk frock and lace stockings. He ran to an angle in the back wall, where a number of fishing-rods leaned, secured one and worked its slender tip beneath the belt of the continuously smiling doll. Poking the long bamboo pole through the window, the rosy miracle on its end, he called, in hectic good-fellowship.

"Got a fish. Want to take it off for me?"

The diversion he had deemed necessary was made.

"Oh," hesitated the little girl, "do I dast? Is it for me?"

"It 's for you, if you 'll go straight home," Bill said urgently.

"Will you tell Alan to come?" she quavered, her eyes on the doll, her hands reaching out to it.

"Sure," Bill gulped. The doll was in her arms. She turned and ran obediently toward the gate.

"I can't come down until you 're round the corner," he shouted after her in warning.

He watched her running along the street which led to the old Beecham place, the great doll bobbing up and down in her hold. Then, with his bundle under one arm, he took his way through the empty afternoon thoroughfares.

The only policeman of the district accosted him gruffly.

"Where 'd you get them things?"

"Down at Winsdale's store."

"I did n't know Winsdale's was open," countered the policeman warily.

"Well, it is," returned Bill. And when he had put sufficient distance between himself and the guardian of the peace, he added jeeringly, "Winsdale's store 's open — I opened it."

He felt better after that — more like himself. The policeman barely threatened him with a shake of the head and a dry grin. The times were such that careful protection of a fleeing merchant's goods was scarcely possible.

Bill found when he got back that he had to help the iron woman to bathe her dead. She was strangely shattered. The death of the child, the final conviction of the futility of her mission, these warred in her breast. Her faith in herself was as dead as the boy they were laving for his last rest, and Missouri Starr had lived for years on her solemn self-righteousness.

Bill did his task with unaccustomed, awkward gentleness. He helped to clothe the body in its white gown, wrapped it in the snowy sheets, bound and tied about it like the wrappings of a mummy, since who knew whether there would be coffins enough? Throughout it all he had a sense of doing this for Mother Missouri. It was never Alan they were working over, Alan with no elbow guard, no swift, "Quit that, Bill!" as he was lifted and shifted. No — no — he was helping Alan's grandmother to do something. He 'd be through presently, and go whistling down the street, giving the signal for Alan to come

out and play — good old Alan who had n't run away from the fever, and had never failed him any day yet.

Dr. Crane came back with the dead wagon — he had guessed about when it would be wanted. Bill made no movement as they lifted his chum and laid him with the others. Poly Bony clucked to the old horse, tugged on the lines and the wheels began to move. The boy on the curb-stone gave a curious half wild look about him and then mutely ran after the vehicle. He 'd got to stop Poly Bony. Alan must come back — if that was Alan in there. They must try again — why Jimmy Crane was here now. They must try again.

Dr. Crane's grasp on his arm restrained him.

" It 's no use, Bill," the young physician said. He stooped and looked keenly into the boy's face. " I 'm worried to death about you. I don't dare send you home to your folks after this. What on earth am I going to do with you? I 'll have to ring up and ask Dr. Kirk."

" Uncle Doc 's got the fever," Bill said like one repeating an uncomprehended lesson. " He 's up at the Crawford house. He said I was n't to tell you until you 'd made all your calls, and I — after Al — we — I forgot about it."

" My God! " cried Jimmy Crane, as his partner had cried earlier in the day. " Kirk down! Kirk? What 'll I do? I have n't got a nurse — there is n't a soul to hand him a cup of water. What shall I do? "

He turned irresolutely toward the cottage they had just quitted. Mother Missouri, very white and shaken,

her vehement hair gathered and braided into a coronet about her head, an old silk dress of tattered splendor replacing the black calico gown, and a pair of shoes on her feet, was just locking the door.

"Could you?" Dr. Crane began uncertainly — "you've nursed among your people — Dr. Kirk's down."

The woman looked at him coldly.

"I am going up to my own house to look after my grandchild," she said very quietly, and with the old-time air of hauteur, the manner of a belle of the sixties. "As soon as the quarantine is lifted I shall leave this town — this accursed town."

Dr. Crane had no time to listen to private griefs or heroics. He slurred over Mother Missouri's change of heart, her fiery arraignment of the spot in which her spiritual bankruptcy had come about, and turned to his buggy. In doing so his despairing glance found Bill untying the horse.

"I'll wait on Uncle Doc," the boy said nervelessly; "you're right, I could n't go home and take the fever to mother, and I don't want you to send me to the pest-house."

He and Alan would have been going in swimming about this time as the evening got cooler. He thought of it with an awful inrush of desolation as he noted the red in the western sky.

"I wish I had n't paid any attention to his talk this morning. I wish I had n't punched him so hard," he was muttering under his breath as he untied the horse and climbed into the buggy beside Crane.

"What?" asked the physician. Then, in reply to Bill's earlier words, "Oh, there is n't any more pest-house. All the houses are pest-houses. I must go to Kirk as quick as I can. What am I going to do with you, Bill? What are you here in my buggy for?"

"I tell you I 'm going up to the Crawford's with you and wait on Uncle Doc," Bill persisted. "I can do it. You know I can. You go tell father and mother. They 've got sense. They 'll see it was the only thing to do."

So Crane left Bill at committee headquarters and drove as near the *Herald* office as a doctor who had not been disinfected dared go. He hailed a negro passing in the street and bade him call Mr. Harvey out. When the father came and stood on the corner, a strange conference took place between the two men, nearly half a block apart. It was short and terribly to the point, as things had to be these days in Watauga.

Crane made his statement with almost none of the considerate preface which would have marked it in days less strenuous.

"Bill 's been exposed to the fever already — thoroughly exposed," he concluded. "That was n't my fault, Harvey. He and this Starr boy that 's just died have been playing all over the infected district anywhere they chose, in the past few weeks, and now he 's sat with the boy three hours and dressed him for the grave."

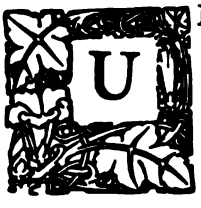
Jimmy Crane could see the father's head droop at that.

"Kirk's down, I tell you — Kirk," he urged. "Somebody's got to nurse him. There is n't a soul to do it, but Bill. You ask his mother. Meet me here in an hour and tell me what she says."

He whirled and was gone. An hour later, on that corner near the improvised *Herald* office, he learned that the parents of William Harvey the Third — or half of William Harvey the Third — left their son in the hands of God.

X

HIS DAY



NCLE DOC did n't make a very good recovery from yellow fever; he was ailing for months, and some time during that succeeding winter he and Aunt Amelia and William went away to Virginia where the old Kirk place was, and were gone a year. Bill bore the loss with equanimity. He was a human boy and the praise he got for nursing Dr. Kirk through the fever was sweet to him; but Aunt Amelia carried it a little too far; he was n't prepared to live up to her adulation. She wanted to give him an open gold watch that had belonged to William the Second, and should logically have descended to William the Third. She caught him in public places and said to him out loud things for which he found no reply, nor tolerance. Yes, he was glad when she was gone.

He even dropped William out of his scheme of things completely, though several neatly written letters came from that youth addressed to Master William Harvey the 3rd, and with a street number which put Bill's identity beyond question. But letters mean little to growing boys, and William's return was as the advent of a stranger.

Mother and son had left Dr. Kirk in New York attending a medical convention, and come to Watauga to get the house ready against his arrival. It had been rented, and the tenants were not yet out, the rectory was full of guests on account of an Episcopal convention, so she and William stayed with Bill's people for the first few days after their arrival.

Coming unexpectedly thus, Mrs. Harvey put her sister-in-law in the guest room and proposed that William and Bill be turned in together. Mrs. Kirk was still fascinated by Bill, something as William was, she still hailed him as her husband's preserver, but she was plainly a little shy of him.

"Oh, do you think William would mind sleeping with Bill?" inquired Mrs. Harvey surprised by the reluctance of her sister-in-law's manner.

"I — I hardly know," Mrs. Kirk temporized. "Could n't you just put a cot in my room, Ruth? William has been of late where he could call on me at any time in the night — he has neuralgia sometimes —"

A strange choked sound came from the corner where Bill had plunged head-first into a roller towel. William blushed until his eyes watered.

"Maybe Aunt Ruth has n't any extra cot. Let me sleep with Bill one night anyhow, Mother," he suggested.

Aunt Amelia looked fondly at her offspring. She had a trick of drawing her blue eyes to a mere line back of their glasses, an anxious, peering look that bespoke the near-sighted soul behind those eyes.

"You would n't fail to manicure your nails properly?" she said with exaggerated urgency.

"Lawd, dat chile neber had no dirt on him," put in Aunt Candace, who was over from the rectory to recommend a new cook and see the new-comers. "Nev' had no dirt on him less 'n Marse Bill put it dar. Huh-uh-uh-h!" giving way to irrepressible chuckles, "Marse Willum 'll need a man-cure ef you leaves him to Marse Bill."

Mrs. Kirk seemed to share the black woman's belief.

"Doan' you mind when Marse Bill bust his lungs inside 'im?" Candace went on. "Marse Willum sho' had sand rubbed in his ha'r dem days."

Mrs. Kirk plainly remembered. She continued to instruct her son in a somewhat tremulous tone. "Take your two grains of quinine in a little hot water—"

"He be in hot water a plenty ef he sleep in Marse Bill's room," chuckled Aunt Candace.

Mrs. Kirk ignored the interruption.

"Read two portions of Cæsar," she went on; "you know we missed one because we were on the train last night."

"I will, Mother, I will," the boy assured her hastily, earnestly.

"Fold your clothes tidily," pursued his mother, warming to her work. "Don't put them on Billy's chair. Have one of your own so as to leave his things untouched."

Aunt Candace stood in the doorway, openly enter-

tained. Well she knew how Bill's outer coverings were strewn from one end of his bedroom to the other.

"Be sure you sleep on your right side," Mrs. Kirk pursued, "and if you feel nervous or anything in the night, come straight to mother."

Again that rich gurgling sound from Bill, his back turned and edging into the hall.

"Behave yo'se'f — ef you knows how," Aunt Candace warned, hitting at him as he passed.

William was surprised at his own sense of strangeness. He could not have said why, but he knew he was afraid of Bill. Half a head shorter, but broader in the shoulder, the Bill-ness of him rampant, he did indeed seem formidable to a sedate mother-trained William. Yet after all this was only the old fascination, with its inevitable tincture of hostility and a touch of strangeness added. As they clattered up the stairs together Bill spoke.

"If you get your clothes on any chair that mine are used to being put on, I 'll eat it," he said.

Below in the quiet sitting-room, Candace gone, the ladies visited.

"Tell me all the news," said Mrs. Kirk. "What was the matter with the Crawfords? You remember they had our house for the first six months, and Wallace never could get any explanation of why they did n't keep it the entire year."

"They 've been having an awful time," explained Ruth. "You know Mr. Crawford 's a good deal older than his wife; I imagine he 's too old to succeed

in business. All their children are married off but Maida, and they 've acted very foolishly about her. She was backward you remember — used to be in the grades with William and Bill though she must be quite a bit older. After the fever, they took her out of the public school and sent her to that little seminary at Gunter's Springs."

Mrs. Kirk nodded.

"It 's a very doubtful thing to send a child away from you to boarding-school or college," she said. "I 'm sure I don't know what I shall do about William. I want his father to agree to move to Virginia if we send our son to the University there. I can't bear the thought of his being away from home at night."

Ruth looked her disapproval.

"That 's what the Crawfords did — they moved to Gunter's Springs and ran the hotel there so as to be in the town where Maida was. That 's why they left your house. She divided her time between the seminary and the hotel, and it seems the teachers objected to some of her social affairs with the drummers, and there was almost a scandal. Six months ago she tried to run away from school and get married and they barely got it stopped. She was expelled of course."

"Is n't that frightful?" inquired Mrs. Kirk. "Was it in the papers?"

As she spoke she stooped and took up the evening journal.

"James kept it out of the *Herald*," said Mrs.

Harvey. "But, of course, it was in all the rest."

Mrs. Kirk was scanning the columns of the sheet she held. She turned to explain in a slightly apologetic tone,

"I always like to examine the literature in any house where William is." She turned over a page and glanced at a head-line. "Whatever became of Mother Missouri Starr and her church?"

"She stuck to the declaration she made at the time of the epidemic and left Watauga as soon as the quarantine was raised," said Ruth Harvey. "She said it was the ingratitude of people, but I guess she 'd got to the end of her resources. The old Beecham place has been sold. I wish I knew where that sweet little girl is — somehow her face haunts me."

"Ruth, don't you think the so-called funny sheets in the newspapers are very unsuitable reading for growing boys?" Mrs. Kirk abruptly changed the subject.

Mrs. Harvey who was mending a rent in Bill's coat — she did it skilfully, having had practice — looked up with her mouth full of pins.

"I don't know," she managed to say.

"They learn such extraordinary expressions from the language used below the pictures," complained Mrs. Kirk. "Forgive me for mentioning it — I feel almost that I 'm committing sacrilege, when he 's such a hero and the savior of Wallace's life; but dear Billy always would say 'Hully Gee' and such things. I wondered sometimes if he caught it from such sheets as this," shaking it out accusingly. "We mothers

can't be too careful. The future men of the world are being molded by us."

"Who knows where boys get things?" commented her sister-in-law smilingly. "I did n't suppose Bill cared much about any part of the paper except the baseball news, but maybe you 're right."

"Oh! Oh! Oh, this is awful! It is really too bad. I can't bear to think of such a thing under the same roof with my boy!" exclaimed Amelia Kirk, as she folded the sheet to get at her find more handily.

"What is it? What have you got there?" demanded Mrs. Harvey with cheerful curiosity.

"Why, look — right here in this town!" ejaculated the visitor, sharing her newspaper horror promptly. "See — there it is: 'Revenged with a Razor; Zack Elder Carved Up By His Sweetheart.' Look at the head-lines. A negro girl becomes converted — Um — um. The girl killed her lover to save his soul — at least that is what she says. It seems he took her rival to church and she felt that the only way to remove such falseness from his heart was to follow and cut it out with a razor." She paused a moment, breathless, then, "I have never let a paper with such an item as that come to the eyes of William," she ejaculated.

"Zack Elder," repeated Mrs. Harvey. "Why, he 's the porter at Green's store, and Bill 's driving one of their delivery wagons during summer vacation. That does come a little close. I think he was one of the small negroes in that boat the day Billy came so near being drowned. Zack Elder — yes, I 'm sure he was."

"I have given up my life to guarding and guiding my boy," said Mrs. Kirk self-righteously. "It 's the only thing Wallace and I don't think exactly alike about. Why, William has never looked upon death; I have never let him attend a funeral, even. He has such sensitive nerves. What 's that?"

She sprang to her feet, dropping the eye-glasses without which she was almost blind. A bumping sound came from above-stairs.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Harvey, "let 'em alone to get acquainted again."

"Good gracious, Ruth — help me find my glasses," Mrs. Kirk entreated. "I dare n't step for fear of breaking them. What on earth *is* that?" As the bumping sounded louder.

Mrs. Harvey, on her knees at that moment, proffered the glasses. Her sister-in-law set them astride her nose and turned to the stairway. The thrashing and bumping overhead had become almost continuous.

"William. My son!" she cried, and looked across her shoulder to see if her hostess was following. Memories of Bill in the "tuber-close" period made her knees wabbly.

"I guess it 's just a pillow fight," murmured Ruth, settling herself in her chair, turning her darning to look at it from the right side. "Bill generally entertains his company that way. It 's hard on the slips but the boys enjoy it."

"Pillow fight!" remonstrated the other. "Do your pillows explode?"

She was shaking and white.

"Oh, I suppose they wrestle over them and sometimes somebody gets thrown," surmised Bill's mother in comfortable tones. "Do you believe you really want to go up, Amelia? I'd never think of interfering. I don't enjoy being hit with a bolster—"

"But—but, Ruth—don't they break things?"

"Pretty much everything in Bill's room is broken—except the spirit of my boy," and she looked with sudden meaning at William's mother.

Then the house trembled to its foundations. Something above-stairs fell and rattled across the floor. A grunting and shrieking which had been making itself heard for some little time was now resolved into words.

"I got a half Nelson on you! That's a half Nelson!"

"Ouch!" This in the voice of William.

Then they heard Bill laugh. After that all was silent. Mrs. Kirk got resolutely under way once more and this time ran breathlessly up the stairs.

"Willie, Willie, are you hurt? Why don't you answer me? Oh, my baby—my baby!"

She was actually crying as she burst open the door on two lads in pajamas. One of them with a whoop of outraged modesty, plunged frantically beneath the sheet that lay heaped on the floor, and glanced from under it, turtle fashion. William, very breathless, and apologetic, stood by the foot of the bed, and stared at his mother.

"Did—did a pillow hit you?" murmured the

frightened woman coming close to lay a shaking hand on his shoulder, to fondle his hair.

She wondered that he grew so white as Bill choked and thrust quantities of crumpled sheet into his mouth to stifle unseemly guffaws. She could not know how her behavior and Bill's mirth poured vinegar in the wounds she daily gave her son's budding manhood. William winced, but he did not fail to put up a hand and cover that of his mother.

"Don't cry," he entreated. "Bill and I were just talking about gym work at the Y. M. C. A. I told him we had n't had any wrestling. He showed me a half Nelson."

Here Mrs. Harvey came running upstairs and told Bill of Zack Elder's tragic taking off.

"Gee!" ejaculated that worthy, crawling a little from his place of concealment, but cautiously re-draping his feet. "Wonder if I can get Zack's place in the store for Poly Bony. He ain't had anything but an off-and-on job at the morgue since fever times."

Next morning the boys were shy of each other. Their first contact had apparently flung them wider apart. Visitors were not permitted by Bill to interfere with business. He departed alone for the store to get his wagon loaded.

The new cook Aunt Candace brought failed to return. Ruth Harvey had breakfast to get. Mr. Harvey was fed and sent forth, then Mrs. Kirk and William came downstairs. They had the air of just having closed a private session of family worship. William, by his mother's command, went into the sit-

ting-room and took a book — presumably that Cæsar which he certainly had n't looked into the night before. Amelia came to help her hostess. As the two sisters-in-law talked together in the kitchen, Bill, hot, dusty, heavy-footed, crossed the back porch audibly, threw open the screen door with a slam that set pots and kettles a-jingle, and demanded,

"Breakfast ready? I 'm as hungry as a hound dog that 's run for his life. Got a green porter this morning o' course. Hello, Aunt Amelia, where 's Sweet William?"

"William," his mother made the correction mechanically, "is in the parlor. I felt that he must read the portion of Cæsar this morning that he missed last night."

Bill glanced through the hall to where the other boy sat, head propped on hand, lips moving, as he studied industriously.

"I 'll give you your breakfast here," his mother put in understandingly. "Had n't you better wash?"

"I say, wash!" retorted Bill testily. "Who do you think I am? Vanderbilt or Rockefeller? I ain't got time to primp. My wagon 's waiting. I expect half the women on Brenner's hill are ringin' up the boss right now to know why I don't get a move on me."

Dropping his cap in a corner and pulling a chair noisily to the table he seated himself and continued his comments on the grocery business as he saw it.

"Mrs. Crawford used to be always keeping us on the jump with five cent orders," he remarked, filling

his mouth generously. "I'd take up soda and she'd say she'd forgot to order salt — I had to come right back, too, because she needed it to get dinner. When she got that, she'd want a five cent loaf of bread. Customers like that ain't any account to a concern. When I run a store I'm going to cut out the nickel plate ones."

"Are the Crawfords back?" asked Aunt Amelia with interest.

"Yeh. An' I'm sorry for it. Goin' to stay now. Moved into their own house last week."

"Go in and speak to your cousin," Mrs. Harvey prodded, seeing a wistful blue-eyed regard turned on Bill from the sitting-room.

"Have n't got time," objected the business man. Then more graciously, "He can come along with me on this morning's rounds, if he wants to. It's the grocers' picnic to-day and I only got one delivery to make."

"Is the horse that you drive perfectly safe?" inquired Mrs. Kirk peering earnestly at Bill. "You would be very careful of your cousin, I know," she added pacifically. "Do you ever drive through any objectionable neighborhoods, Billy? I hate to have my boy go near a saloon. You would n't be where he would hear any bad language?"

During these remarks William appeared in the doorway. His large blue eyes glowed as they rested fondly on brown, muscular Bill. The boys nodded to each other.

"I have n't finished setting the table yet," Mrs.

Harvey advanced hesitating objection, "William's breakfast —"

"Aw, give him a snack in his hand," bawled her son, reaching for his cap, as he pushed back his chair. "I could n't wait for him to eat here, anyhow."

And the one comfortably filled with beefsteak, batter cakes and fried potatoes, looked the contempt he then felt for mere food.

"Well," hesitated Mrs. Kirk, "maybe — fresh air —"

Bill plunged a mass of heterogeneous eatables into a newspaper, wadded it together and stuffed it down hard in William's pocket, then led the way.

The grocer's old horse jerked up his head at the sound of Bill's step and before the boys were safely seated in the shackling wagon, set off in a canter.

"He knows he better get a move on him when he hauls my chariot," Bill announced.

There was a period devoted entirely to rapid transit and mastication, Bill not scorning to share his guest's breakfast-lunch. Then they drew up with a flourish before the gate of the Crawford place. William was full of respect as his cousin leapt over the wheel, admonishing the horse,

"You start before I give you the word and I 'll jerk the liver out of ye!"

William repeated that phrase over and over not to lose it while Bill let down the wagon back with a bang, hauled out a small sack of flour and a crate of meager vegetables, and, thus armed, assaulted the front door.

An indignant, stout lady met him at the portal.

"You, Bill Harvey — go round to the kitchen door. You shall not drag that sack of flour through my front hall. No, you shall not! Just look at the trail you're leaving and I've barely finished cleaning up!"

But Bill had already reached the kitchen where he could be heard, shouting, "Where'll I empty the crate?"

"Not on the floor! Now you heard me well enough — I said not on the floor. Wait till I come," screamed Mrs. Crawford, running through the house.

"I ain't got time to waste on foolishness," the overworked merchant grumbled as he shot out of the kitchen door and dodged around the house.

With fascinated eyes William watched him jump to the high seat, yank the horse and send him forward at a pace that set the crazy wheels rattling from side to side as they sped down the street.

"Won't you be complained of?" he asked softly. He felt that he was living life in condensed æons.

"How'd I know Mrs. Crawford'd come to the door?" Bill defended his deed. "Maida most always lets me in, if I go the front way. Let her complain at the store, I don't mind — unless father gets hold of it — and they won't tell him."

William, while he held to the seat to keep from being bounced out, considered many things. At last,

"If Mrs. Crawford should tell your mother, then, when she consults with your father about your best interests, she'd tell him."

"Gee — naw!" Bill stared at the suggestion.

"Does n't your mother tell everything about your — your moral welfare to your father?"

"She 'd be scared to," returned Bill with conviction.

William's mouth fell open. He studied the driver long.

"Do you mean that — you 'd do something to her?"

"Me? No — o' course not. She 'd be scared to tell father on me — I reckon that 's what you mean by moral welfare — because sometimes she 'd be liable to get me an awful licking, and she could n't stand for that — mother could n't."

William seemed inclined to push his inquiries — one could guess that too much moral welfare was beginning to pall on him, but Bill cut him short.

"Got one more delivery to make and then I want to see a boy," he said. "I 'll take you along."

"Is — is he a nice boy?"

The inquiry was put eagerly.

"Nice? You bet your boots he is. He would n't fight, nor swear — you won't hear any bad words from him. He 's sure good — now."

William looked distinctly disappointed.

"Could n't you go and see him some other day?" he suggested on a falling note.

"Nope," returned Bill cheerfully. "He 'll be buried this afternoon."

"Oh," choked William over the vastness of his opportunity. "I never saw a corpse in my life. I suppose he is —"

"He 's the one Auntie Am and mother were talking

about last night, sure. Here 's all about it in this piece of paper that was round your lunch."

He thrust the greasy, food-stained paper into his cousin's willing fingers. Once more he banged down the wagon-back and made a delivery. When he returned trailing the empty basket on the ground according to the best ethics of grocers' delivery service, he found William dumb upon the wagon-seat, devouring excitedly the ill-written account of the killing, and an ill-buttered biscuit that he had discovered lurking, stuck to the paper.

"I remember Zack," he whispered between bites. "Will they let us see him?"

"Sure. He worked in our store and our cook 's one of the mourners. That 's why she did n't come to get breakfast."

William trembled through all his slim, eager young body. His pale cheeks had a tinge of color when he and Bill, having turned the old horse in at the stable, set their faces towards the morgue.

"Shake your legs, Sweet William. We got to walk faster. Zack was a pretty decent nigger — if he 'd just had sense enough to let the girls alone," remarked Bill in a tone of experience, as they set forth.

Poly Bony, his grin decently suppressed, dark lips clothing his ivories decently, lounged at the open door.

"You can't see him noways, Marse Bill," he said lugubriously. "He ain't fitten to be mourned yet awhile."

"William and me have got to go in," Bill asserted

with the air of authority which had so often carried him through doubtful undertakings. "We're — from the store."

Poly Bony was properly affected by this cryptic assertion.

"I reckon you has to go in, den," he capitulated, and slouched, with an explanatory word at the office, into the room called the cooler.

What joy the carefully brought up William expected to find in this experience, who can say? It was new; it was what his mother did not allow him, and he fancied it was knowing such things that made Bill, Bill, the lack of knowing them that made him William. He entered, gave one glance at what lay on the slab; a desperate faintness seized him. He turned his head away and caught at anything for support. His hand touched a block of ice. He jerked it back and stood, head down, fighting for composure.

"Who 'd ever thunk a yaller gal could carve a feller up dat-a-way?" philosophized Napoleon with a sigh. "I was hankerin' atter dat gal m'se'f too. Lawzy — we don't know what 's good fer us."

He shook his head, straightened something about the bier, and the crossed black hands fell apart.

William uttered one cry and fled. He came to himself in the strange outer room, an office, with a clerk in charge, the sunlight coming to the threshold and stopping — no farther fared it!

Then he was brought sharply to his senses by the sound of Bill's laughter — such a spontaneous, irrepressible, coughing laugh it was — and so out of

place! Even Poly Bony forgot professional ethics and gave a quickly smothered snort.

William stood pallid, dismayed, suddenly aware that he had called out upon the name of his mother — and that it was a shameful thing to do, in fear.

Bill was honestly sorry. William was William — born that way — and brought up that way, too, and there was no use making him unhappy about it.

"Come on, Sweet William," he chirruped. "We 'll hunt up something more cheerful. That yellow girl ain't going to get you."

XI

HIS NIGHT

THE boys emerged on a hot sunny street. Bill stepped buoyantly, William slunk after him. It would be worthy a philosopher's notice to reflect upon the difference in the worlds upon which these two lads looked forth. Bill saw the town, a region of adventure and delight, open before him; all time was his, in that he had no more work to do that day. To William, the sidewalk that ran past him represented the straight way by which he might walk home and detail to his mother his recent activities, soliciting, perhaps, permission for further movements which should square with her ideas of what would be best for him.

"I 've got it — the very thing," ejaculated Bill, stopping suddenly, diving into his pocket and fingering some article which he found there. Then he frowned heavily and turned to William. "I told Maida 'bout a thousand times not to let her mother bother me when I 'm at work. Women don't know anything about business. Now look at that — she 's gone and chased me off before I had time to leave her old candles! Anybody that 'd use 'em for lights anyhow!"

He drew out and exhibited two broken tallow candles.

"No account to her now," he commented darkly. Then abruptly laid aside his frown, and inquired with much animation, "Say, William, are you game to explore the cave? I've been laying off to get to the end of it for nearly a year."

William forgot his humiliation. Remembering the finer feelings in Bill's presence was much like stirring a welsh-rarebit in a burning house — possible, but not probable.

"I think perhaps mother would approve of that," he began hopefully. "She might think it was instructive. We went to a lecture in New York about Mammoth Cave."

He sighed and fell silent as he remembered the lengthened list of questions to which he had memorized suitable answers after that Mammoth Cave lecture.

"All right," agreed Bill nonchalantly. "We can catch a street car here that 'll carry us within a mile of the mouth."

William hurried along beside his cousin ashamed to suggest that he had expected to go home and ask his mother's consent. Why would n't her approval do as well after the excursion as before? He would get a stalactite. He would secure for her the peace offering of a stalagmite. There might be Indian relics.

It was a steep tramp and steadily up, after they left the street car, but Bill's songs and jests enlivened the way. "So long, Mary," and "Hit the Pike Lightly,"

shouted in snatches and echoed back from the frowning bluffs above them, sublime and hoary, had a rhythm and carrying swell that drowned fatigue. William offered well-rendered selections from opera, such as his mother cared for. His clear, cultivated voice was tuneful and correct, but there was n't much marching stimulus to his tunes. Bill's discordant chanties made you want to go. One in particular, that proudly published the words,

> "The girl had a hole in the heel of her stocking,
> And her slipper it kept a-rocking and a-rocking,"

seemed to walk for them, to put wings on their feet. And rocking — rocking — rocking, they kept moving forward as unconsciously as the girl's slipper.

They talked of the old bunch as they tramped, how Ted Winsdale was going to college next year, if his folks could afford it, and Buster Crane had a bull terrier that made mere college seem a poor thing.

"Newt Green 's in his father's blacksmith shop," Bill enlarged. "Gee, but he 's got a muscle on him!"

"Maida —" William got no further than the first word.

"Aw, Maida Crawford 's got the sillies. She 's been in a school they call a cemetery — or ought to — at Gunter's Springs. She can't look straight at you. She puts her head on one side like this,"— Bill's imitation was scarcely exact, but it was irresistibly comic —"and peeps at you out of the corners of her eyes and calls you Billy-boy. Well, maybe she would n't call *you* that — I s'pose she 'd call you Willie-boy.

Girls —" and he consigned half of creation to oblivion with a final growl.

Like the audience chamber of an oriental potentate, the cave had to be entered on hands and knees. Indeed it was rather an undignified hole in the ground, with a good deal of crawling for those who would explore it. William tried to slip under face upward and scraped off his collar-button and a piece of chin. Yet neither boy was disappointed. Bill burned his fingers with hot tallow cheerfully, skirted crevices, a fall down which meant instant extinction, and puffed a wheezy shout of triumph when they were able to cut their initials further back than any other boy had ever done.

William found neither stalactites nor stalagmites for his mother; but, alone in the dark with his cousin, called upon by the exigencies of the hour for instant judgment and swift courage, he kept discovering, moment by moment, a little more Bill in himself.

"I 'm hungry — ain't you?" grunted Bill as they came blinking out into the sunlight at the cave's mouth. "The pit of my stomach feels like a house had fell out. Say, let 's mosey along to Glen Cove. I know a fellow there. He 'll feed us up fine and we can go back to town on the train. We 'll get back sooner that way."

Laughing, whistling, their moment of comparative sobriety vanished, they took up the trail. It was a hot day. Perspiration trickled from William's white brow. His nose and cheek bones tingled where they would afterwards blister and peel. The boys de-

scended the mountain upon the further side. They came upon other elevations. Hills lifted and sank, to be scrambled up and half rolled down with shouts and racing.

Glen Cove played hide and seek with them, and their hunger. They found a little board store sitting by the dusty road, and bought sardines and soda crackers and striped candy, gorging themselves blissfully in the shade of a wayside bush, and lying down to rest thereafter, for a brief and happy season. Suddenly William looked up at the sky, wide-eyed.

"Why — what 's the matter with the sun?" he asked.

"It 's going down," allowed Bill easily, speaking as one familiar with the firmament and not easily surprised by its doings. William sat up with an air of alertness which plainly covered much anxiety.

"Are — are we almost there?"

A man was plowing far off in a field. Dispassionately Bill flung himself at the fence and bellowed,

"Say! How far is it to Glen Cove?"

The man stopped his team in a furrow, pushed back his hat and scratched his head.

"Which one?" he yelled. "There 's Upper Glen Cove an' there 's Lower Glen Cove. You 're five miles from Upper and seven miles from Lower. You 'll never get to neither of 'em, the way you 're goin'. It 's two sights and a hornblow to —"

"Where 's the nearest station?" Bill cut him short.

"Th' station?" He settled his hat more firmly on his head as though such fearful gusts of thought might

blow it away. "Well, now, Wildwood 's 'bout three mile east. Ef you hurry you can ketch the seven o'clock for town."

William got to his feet, stepped on a rolling stone and shut his teeth over a cry of pain. Bill silently slipped a big shoulder under his cousin's arm and the two made the best time left in their tired muscles, until the taller boy sank to the ground pale, suffering, done up.

"Hello!" said Bill cheerfully. "Is that the way you feel? Say,

> "Aunt 'Melia had a little lamb,
> Its fleece was white as snow,
> It followed Bill around one day
> And look at the blamed thing now!"

William joined weakly in the laugh against himself, and got from it strength to resume the journey. It was at that moment that Bill sowed a seed that was to bear much harvest, sowed it in the most unselfish and generous spirit, intent only on taking William's mind from an aching ankle.

"Brent Tarver and Newt Green are calling on girls. I saw 'em Sunday afternoon, all dyked out, ringin' a door bell on Brenner hill," he communicated.

"Did you? What did they have on? What girl was it? Was everybody looking at them?" questioned William, forgetting his lameness.

Bill's microbe of entertainment was of the grasshopper variety. Instead of replying, he veered unexpectedly to quite a different subject.

"I say, William," and he wickedly chuckled, "mother won't be expecting us till dark. But father 's liable to raise a row when he gets home. I bet he 'll send Poly Bony out to the cave after us. Mother 'll guess in a minute where I am — she always does. Won't Poly be mad when he has to stop mourning over Zack to come out and hunt all through that cave, and then I turn up sound and well and swear I was n't there!" He bubbled with the joy of it. Sobering suddenly he added, "I 'm sorry about Aunt Amelia though. I know how she worries over you. Honest, I expected to get to Glen Cove early enough to telephone."

On and on they moved. Shadows marched in procession up the sky like nuns whose rosaries were stars. It was all still and big and splendid out there in the twilit woods. The boy's tongues ran swiftly. William had little to relate of his decorous days since they left Watauga. They had staid longest in a small Virginia town. Dr. Kirk had shaken a disapproving head, and then let his mother have her way. There had been music lessons, tea with two dear old ladies who had a Persian cat and a library, sedate excursions to places of interest, carrying his mother's parasol, dutifully supplying her smallest wish.

Since the fever Bill had lived through countless adventures. Football — see that scar — had been suspended once; there was a new principal, a woman, not like Old Broxey; last vacation he carried a rod for a surveying party back in the mountains — it was one of those men who had moved to Glen Cove; oh,

yes, he and Newt Green and Ted Winsdale had started to run away, they planned to ride the freight bumpers to New York. Ted had some money, but Bill had weakened. "Could n't bear to think of mother coming up to my room — she does it every night when she thinks I don't know — and peeking in. She would n't understand — they can't. She 'd think — well, I chucked it up, and so the others did n't go."

They topped a rise, and saw the little station of Wildwood twinkling with light in the valley below, the twin line of rails stretching away from it towards home.

Suddenly at the edge of the lighted area, Bill pulled up.

"Holy smoke!" he whispered. "You got any mon', Sweet William? I spent all mine for that grub."

William groaned.

"Mother does n't believe in a boy carrying money around with him unless it 's for some special use," he explained.

Bill tightened his lips and they advanced to the view of a group of loungers in the station porch.

"My father 's R. J. Harvey," Bill opened out, "editor of the Watauga *Herald*. Any of you know him?"

No response. "Well, then, my grandfather 's William Harvey, Rector of St. Jude's. I 'm William Harvey the Third. My cousin and I got lost and spent all our money. We want to get enough from some of you for tickets home. You can go to the *Herald* office and get the money, or to grandfather. This boy's

mother will just about die in hysterics if we don't show up on time."

A lank citizen who had been leaning against the wall extricated a horny hand from a cavernous pocket and remarked.

"Ye say you 're William the Third? What 's the name of that thar' boy?"

"He 's William the Third, too," said Bill incautiously.

There was a wild guffaw at this, and the men formed a circle.

William, looking about upon their jeering, inquiring faces, poured forth the history of his name. He gave his birthplace. He supplied the emotions and family feeling which had led to his christening. He interested and amused his audience mightily. He wound up with a plea for enough extra money to telephone.

There was a silence. Then a sallow man with chin whiskers made drawling entrance into the conference.

"Long distance is out o' order. You 'll hafto tellygraft. Want us to pass the hat?" he inquired jocosely.

"The hat," repeated William. "My cousin and I 've got too many blisters on our heels to dance, and my ankle 's sprained, but I can sing if you —"

A roar of appreciative mirth drowned this proposition.

Bill watched and listened with grim disfavor. You 'd never get anywhere that way — of so much he was sure. When William had uttered all that was in

him — and perhaps a little more that came to him on the spur of the moment — his stubbed cousin once more took the center of the stage.

"Now, what 's the use of all that?" he inquired. "He 's William Harvey and I 'm Bill Harvey. If anybody knows our folks or has heard of us and wants to help us, I 'll be much obliged."

The lank citizen who had made the first trouble advanced with hat off and hand extended. A small piece of silver lay on his palm.

"We pass the hat," he said firmly, "an' that goes in fust. I don't know any William Harveys — third or thirtieth — but Bill Harvey was the name of the boy that drummed the children out of the Third District school, when hit burned down. I had a little gal in that there schoolhouse. Yes, sir. Bill Harvey 's welcome to a quarter from me. If the rest of you gents are generous, I reckon these two kids 'll git home on time."

Bill was almost as abashed as though they had raked up an old scandal in his past. He left William to take the money that was collected for them, and rushed into the station to send their message.

The message that left Wildwood — it was decided to send it to Mrs. Harvey as the one most inured to shocks of this kind — ran,

"Delayed Wildwood. Home to-night. Tell Aunt Amelia. Have plenty supper. Bill."

And here might have ended the Odyssey of their wanderings, had not the motion of the train lulled both boys to sleep, so that when they reached Watauga

Bill waked as a giant refreshed, to a city which had itself awakened, electrically brilliant and offering renewed amusement. It was half past eight when they pulled into the station, and the blood in Bill's veins began to leap to the old tune.

"Say, William," he opened genially, "I reckon some folks 'd think we ought to go right home; but they 'd have another think comin'. Our folks have got that telegram. I ain't sleepy, are you?"

"No," agreed William doubtfully.

"Well — say," wheeled Bill, "we 'll go in the direction of home, but it 'll take us past where they 're building the new postoffice. They 've got her up five stories. Gee! Would n't it be fine to go up on the top of the frame and look down at all the lights and things?"

"Sure," agreed William.

Bill's intentions were of the best — it was surprising to reflect how good his intentions always were in the actions for which he was most signally reproved; yet when they came to the gaunt black skeleton standing like an ebony tracery against the night sky, he completely forgot his cousin's limitations.

"Would you like to go up there, honest?" he demanded with animation.

The day's lessons had soaked into William, it was time for them to begin to come out.

"Sure as shootin'," he responded with an attempt at Bill-ness.

Bill selected a couple of bricks and handed one to his companion. He captured a sheet of blowing paper,

rent it in two, and proffered the half for wrapping.

"If anybody sees us going up without anything in our hands they'll think we're crazy in the head. Come on," he whispered and started for a long ladder.

William, wide-eyed and a little weak in the knees for many reasons, climbed close at his heels.

"Hello, there — what are you boys doing? Come back here!" shouted the watchman.

"Aw, fade away," Bill flung over a steady shoulder, waving his explanatory bundle. "Ain't we gotta take these things up for the boss?"

The tone was confident. Each boy carried a parcel. They had no other rational reason for going up; all this was convincing to a stupid man. They were allowed to proceed, though followed by a wavering question from the watchman.

"Boys, is the boss up there?"

"You wait till you find out," pronounced Bill ominously. "You ought to 've been watching."

He came to a landing at the third story where the concrete floor was being laid. William attempted to swing around the ladder as his cousin had done. He could have accomplished the feat, for he was keyed to lofty resolve, but he could not resist a downward glance, and struck the injured ankle against something, at the same time his arm came in contact with a steel framed wheel-barrow. The ladder swerved; the barrow tipped; William plunged downward.

Bill, clutching a pillar, stared after him for what seemed centuries; deadly nausea overcame the watcher.

In that swift instant he felt the enormity of his own course.

But William was not Bill's cousin for nothing; nor had he spent a strenuous day with that enterprising youth in vain. He had the courage, his gymnasium training had given him the skill, and this sudden plunge into the realities of life added the exigency.

Afterward he could remember no terror of the fall itself, but only a great fear lest he should fail to come up to what Bill expected, or get his cousin into trouble. Swift as thought he snatched at a projection, caught, and brought up with a jerk that nearly pulled his arms from their sockets, hanging to the cornice of the second story. As he hung there he felt the wind of the heavy barrow go past him, and the thing itself graze his shoulder, and heard it crash to the basement where it lay crushed to scrap-iron.

Clinging in his desperate position, William looked up. He met Bill's eyes, big with terror for him, glowing with admiration of his prowess.

"Hang on!" cried Bill. "Swing to her, William. Help's on the way. Freeze to it. Somebody's shinnin' up from below, now."

"All right!" panted the boy who had nearly fainted at the sight of a dead man, who had seen spooks in the dark cave, who referred all questions and decisions to his mother. "All right," he repeated without shake or tremor in his tone. "I can get down. Watch me."

Using a trick familiar to him in the gymnasium, he swung his body pendulum fashion till his feet struck

against a steel pillar near at hand, caught about it, slipped down it and brought up on the floor, standing erect and a little breathless, but immeasurably happy.

Like a monkey in much haste, Bill ran down the ladder to him, flung an arm across his shoulder and cried out to the gathering group hurrying to the scene of the accident.

"Aw — what's the matter with you folks This is my cousin. He always comes downstairs that way! He ain't hurt. He ain't even scared. Pooh, that was nothing to do!"

"Naw — I ain't hurt," William chimed in with greatly improved Bill-ness. "What're you eating? I mean, what's eating you?"

"Come on," Bill cried hurrying down the last ladder.

The watchman was anxious to get them away without further inquiry in which his carelessness must have been shown.

"Well, move on then — move on," he urged.

"Come along, Bill. Let's hunt up a real high building to slide down," suggested William grandly.

Nonchalantly they pushed through the crowd, the older boy copying, as best he could, his junior's half belligerent roll. Neither spoke of the new tie forged between them this day. They stepped side by side, arms over each other's shoulders, exchanging monosyllables as became men of the world. And there was nothing for it now but to go home.

Mrs. Kirk met them in the gate. Brent Tarver

had arrived at the house, just as she was fairly recovering from the telegram, with an excited version of the accident at the new postoffice. Stories of the sort were too frequent in Mrs. Harvey's experience to bring her to the front door. She remained in the rear, heaping a table with much provender.

"Oh, William," cried that youth's mother, "were you hurt? Did you really go up that awful skyscraper with Bill? Why, your face looks so queer — I believe it 's blistered — and your shoes are all skinned up."

She pounced upon her offspring and clutched him. William, his shoes nearly torn from his feet, with clothing mud-marked, brier-scratched — a tatterdemalion scarecrow with soil-streaked, blistered face, yet strangely buoyant, forceful, and masculine in his degradation, stepped proudly into the full light of the open door.

Mrs. Kirk gasped. Must it always be like this?

And then came Ruth Harvey, composed, smiling, talking of supper. Amelia felt the two boys and her sister-in-law were free of a world that would always be strange to her feet. She wondered at Ruth's courage.

"It 's all ready now, Bill. Bring William."

"Step lively, William," advised Bill, "I 'm beating you to it. If you want any grub you better come and scuffle for it."

XII

HIS FIRST FORMAL CALL

IN every boy's life there arrives a time when the other half of creation — the soft, fine, mysterious half — suddenly starts out from the general, the usual, the accepted, and takes upon itself the features of Fate. Girls and women? — why, yes — but on this day arrives the Eternal Feminine. This time of course came to William before it could be known to Bill. Not only was he older than his cousin but he had, in spite of his stepfather's wholesome efforts, imbibed his ideas much from a sentimental mother.

It was not till this time arrived that William told Bill about meeting Lynette Starr and Miss Missouri Starr back in Virginia, where it seems the family had connections. He spoke of the Starr girl's looks until Bill laughed, and then he got mad. He supplemented this information by statements concerning the number of times he had seen girls home from parties while he stayed on the plantation, the strong ambition he had entertained toward showing similar attentions to Lynette.

"But her grandmother's just as bad as she used

to be when she was a preacher," he told his cousin. "She dresses up all the time now and acts as though she was a queen and Lynette was a princess. None of the men had any chance."

"Men," snorted Bill, and was moved to boast of that first kiss of his, but somehow could n't.

He thought it was because he had followed up the matter so poorly, failing at the crucial moment, and never getting back to the time when it would have been an easy and natural thing to kiss a girl good-night. Generally William in this mood bored him and he affected more than formerly the society of Newt Green. On Sundays especially, when William donned the novel glory of long trousers, Bill put up with him in the forenoons and dispensed with him in the afternoons.

One gorgeous spring day, when the air was full of sappy, half-recognized scents, with stumps by the wayside showing the steely glimmer of winged ants, Bill had changed comfortably into his ordinary attire and debated the advisability of hunting up Newt Green for a Sunday afternoon's diversion when to him appeared William stalking solemnly along the board sidewalk, maintaining a debilitated, hamstrung gait, stopping every few paces to brush dust from his shoes with a pocket handkerchief, clad in attire so irreproachably prepared and put on that it looked insanely different from his usual Sunday wear. He seemed to be troubled in his mind about something, and regarded Bill with a mingling of doubt and welcome.

"Hello," said the latter briefly. "Where y' goin'?"

"I was thinking of calling on Maida Crawford," said William with an affectation of carelessness, though the red mounted steadily under his fair skin. "She 's got a friend visiting her — awfully jolly girl. I thought I 'd drop in this afternoon and — call."

"What?" inquired Bill, stringently.

In Watauga, you just went to see people — girls and all — until you had been in long pants as much as a year. William had on his first pair of those dignifying garments. To be sure he had worn them for some time, and a similar pair fitted to Bill's anatomy reposed at home in a bureau drawer. Bill intended to wear his again next Sunday. But to call! And Maida Crawford had been away at boarding-school, and brought back a boarding-school girl with her. The young Methodist minister might be expected to "show attentions" to such girls as that, or even Jimmy Crane.

"Want to go along?" William put the question with unexpected directness.

He was mentally reviewing a chapter in "Hints and Helps to Young Men in Social and Business Relations," a volume which he conceived had suggested to him the enterprise upon which he was now embarked. It was certainly a William enterprise, yet without Bill to back it — even to jeer at it — he had a lopped, shorn feeling. He surveyed his cousin's costume with an unusually critical eye. The two boys had sat on the same bench in Sunday school, swelling

the number of their grandfather's Bible class, not three hours ago; yet since then William's world had polarized in a new spot, and there was a madness of readjustment going on within him.

"Me go callin'?" inquired Bill, startled, yet fascinated.

"Calling — on the girls," repeated William, twitching his chin above his collar as he had seen the clerk in the hotel do, but answering with carefully averted gaze.

"On the girls," Bill repeated the fateful words, and even his cheerful impudence felt the shadow of awe.

According to the social creed in which he had been brought up, you might, after a certain age, see the girls home from night church, socials, or parties; you could hang over the gate, and you dared walk with a girl in the cemetery of a Sunday afternoon; William and Bill had both, as we know, found fleeting feminine attachments in school and in the choir; but to ring a front door bell, and ask for Miss Heart's Desire, one must have been in long trousers at least that year — so ran the unwritten law.

Ever since William got his long trousers there had been hints of this sort of thing brewing in him; now that Bill had similar garments the outburst had come. There is a known law of physics which tends to the equilibrium of things. Bill was always being drawn to the imbibing of some of his cousin's William-ness, while William, here openly desired, for the rounding of this cape of storms, to add a certain Bill-ness to his equipment.

"D' you reckon we could?" the shorter boy asked, as he trotted along beside a somewhat irresponsive companion.

This was not the hearty support William had expected.

"Don't start it if you think you can't finish," he said sourly. "I suppose you ain't really old enough to call on the girls. You aren't unless you think you are. The Crawfords are just back from Gunter's Springs. They've brought some of the hotel servants with them. They're living in a good deal of style. They're going to run a boarding-house here. Maybe it'll be too much for you. Cut it out, Bill."

Bill drew up a bit and studied his cousin with astonishment and some disfavor. Was this the youth he had rescued from his mother's apron-strings — this boy who braved even his mentor and guide? Why the very intonation of that "cut it out" — the phrase itself — Bill felt to be his own. Hah! he'd try the mettle of this precocious disciple. He did not reckon with the strength of that primal instinct which makes a man of a boy; yet the same was beginning to work in himself.

"Going calling on the girls with your collar and boots all dirty?" he jeered, by way of asserting himself. "They won't know you're a caller."

Sensitive William stopped short in his dusty tracks. He whitened at the tragic insinuation. After all he must have the wholesome stay and companionship of freckle-faced Bill.

"I put the dirt on a-purpose, so as to look kind of

careless," he half whispered in an agony of doubt. "Do you suppose I 'd better go in to your place and try to wash it off? Aunt Ruth would n't have to know anything about it, would she?"

"I 've got two clean collars left," announced Bill, proudly generous. "I 'll lend you one. You can put it on while I 'm putting on my — while I 'm getting ready. Never mind mother — I 'll tell her. I 'll say we 're just stepping out to do a little calling on the girls."

Here spoke the Bill he had hoped for! William welcomed him, in spite of certain jealous twinges. He reflected with satisfaction that there were two girls at the Crawfords.

Mrs. Harvey let them pass her in the hall in her usual easy-going fashion. Then almost mechanically she followed into the dining-room to set out food.

"We did n't come in for a piece, Mother," Bill told her hastily, making for the stairway.

William, big with the importance of their mutual intention, inclined his head stiffly in greeting, and looked toward Bill for explanation. He trembled a little, yet it was with delight, as he anticipated the effect of the speech that had been outlined. But it failed to come.

"We 're not hungry, Mother," was the revised edition which the freckle-faced boy offered to the maternal ear, "I — we 're going over to Mr. Crawford's — on — er — on an errand for Aunt Amelia."

The older boy made no comment, but he looked reproach as they clattered up the stairs to Bill's room,

where the clean collar was produced and a small stock of ties, while Bill dashed for the closet shelf to reinstate his long pants.

"You'd wear a necktie — would n't you?" Bill asked when this *toga virilis* was in place.

"Yes. But make it fall carelessly over your shirt-front," advised the student of "Hints and Helps." "Your collar's miles too big for me. Say, I've got a wad of chewing-gum; would you flat it out and stick it over the collar-button? Maybe that would fill up some. You kick my foot if you see me turning my head so's to knock it off."

"Better button up your vest," cautioned Bill, laboring with the "careless" fall of his tie.

"Huh-uh," objected the infatuated William, "I want 'that easy air which presupposes familiarity with society' — that's what it says in my book."

"Sure." Bill returned to his more familiar jeering attitude. "Loosen up all your clothes, then. Why don't you untie your shoes? Flop a sock down over one of 'em — that looks 'easy' all right."

William buttoned his vest.

"Mother says," he began hesitatingly, "that it makes a great deal of difference in a man's social success to be good-looking. She — she thinks I resemble my father very much." He was taking up all the room in front of the mirror as he spoke.

Bill, at the wash-stand soaking his hair to get the curl out of it, grumbled some unintelligible response, and stared in blank incomprehension at a boy who cared about being pretty, unaware that the same virus

was beginning to work with a difference in his own tough young frame. The two boys finally crept downstairs side by side with tremulous hearts.

"Why, you 've put on your long trousers, Billy-boy," Mrs. Harvey called from her chair — mother's eyes can see so far! "Did — have you boys been tearing up Jack, and had an accident?"

Bill muttered something inaudible, and the two sad-eyed boys on the porch paused and gazed at each other. Pshaw! What was the use of trying to be grown up, if even a body's mother so misunderstood?

For some time they plodded along in silence, William religiously remembering not to dislocate the wax on his collar-button. Perhaps his unnatural stiffness got on Bill's nerves — if a boy in the growing age can be said to have nerves; for as the roof of the Crawford house began to peer above the crest of the hill, that hero plumped down on a stone and announced, "I ain't goin'."

"Come on," urged the blue-eyed boy. "It 'll be fun — and everybody 'll respect us more when we 've called."

"Called!" grumbled Bill. "I could n't make a call, any more 'n a cow. What 'd I say? What 'd I do? I can behave all right when you just go to people's houses — but to call!"

William hesitated. Should he give away his brilliant inside information, drawn from the "Hints and Helps" book, and be rivaled in the glory of his manners and learning? Why should he not pass on alone, perfectly composed, and reap the field of glory unsup-

ported? His knees gave way at the mere suggestion. He sat down without intending it.

"Don't you tell anybody, and I 'll put you on to exactly what grown-up gentlemen say and do when they go calling on the girls," he began.

"Fire away," retorted Bill, gloomily. "Nobody 'll find out from me. Dead men tell no tales. If I 'm fool enough to go, I don't expect to come out of it alive."

William rose, white and shaking, and, thrusting three fingers into the buttoning of his vest, extending the other hand like an orator, proceeded to instruct the freckled, perspiring disciple at his feet.

"'Hang your hat on the rack, or give it to a servant.'"

Bill nodded intelligently. He could do that.

"'Let your legs be gracefully disposed, one hand on the knee, the other—'"

He came to an unhappy pause. "I forget what a fellow does with the other hand. Might stick it in your pocket, I suppose. 'Do not saw the air with gestures, or laugh loudly, or spit on the carpet. Indulge in little frivolity. Let a rich stream of conversation flow!'"

Bill mentally dug within himself for sources of rich streams of conversation. He found a dry soil.

"What you goin' to talk about?" he demanded fretfully. "I won't go a step farther till I know what I 'm goin' to say when I get there."

William began to repeat fragments from "Hints and Helps."

"'It is best to remark,'" he opened, in an unnatural voice, "'How well you are looking!' although fulsome compliments should be avoided. When seated, ask the young lady who her favorite composer is.'"

"What 's a composer?" inquired Bill irritably, with visions of soothing-syrup in his mind.

"A man that makes up music. Don't butt in that way; you put me all out," objected William the exact. "—'composer is. Name yours. Ask her what pieces of music she likes best. Name yours. If the lady is musical, here ask her to play or sing.'"

This chanted recitation seemed to have an hypnotic effect on the freckled boy; his big pupils contracted each time William came to the repeated, "Name yours."

"I 'm tired already," he grumbled. But some spell made him rise and fare further.

When they had entered the Crawford gate they leaned towards each other like young saplings, weakened at the root and locking branches to keep what shallow foothold on earth remained.

"You 're goin' in first," asserted Bill but without conviction. No memory of the time when he drove the grocer's delivery wagon and assaulted the Crawford kitchen every morning with peculiar ferocity, finding there at that hour Maida in a before-breakfast humor, and joyously quarreling with her while he performed his errands, came to help him. He was gagged and hamstrung by the hypnotism of William's scheme.

"'Walk quietly up the steps; ring the bell, and lay your card on the servant,'" quoted William, making a slight error in the words.

"Lay your card on the servant!" echoed Bill. "Cady 'd dodge. There 'll be a porch to cross after you go up the steps — does it say anything about that?"

"It says that the card should be placed on the servant," William reiterated, doggedly. "If Cady dodges, it ain't any business of mine. There are no porches in my book. Just walk across like anybody. We 'll ask for Miss Crawford and the young lady that 's visiting her."

"We have n't got any cards," discovered Bill with hope.

"I have," announced William. "I had some struck off down at your father's office. That boy that 's in the job room put me on to it. They had a lot of new cards with scalloped gilt borders. I 've got one with me."

He produced a bit of cardboard, and Bill looked with awe at the legend, "Mr. William Harvey the 3rd."

"Gee!" he said. "I wish I 'd thought about gettin' some. Dalby 'd have made 'em for me all right."

"Won't this do for both of us?" inquired William. "I 'm sorry I only brought one — but it 's your name just as much as it 's mine."

Bill looked at the imposing card doubtfully. He had no wish to claim the entitlement on it.

"Not quite as much," he demurred. "Reckon I 'd better write my name on."

He secured the card, fished up a chewed stump of lead pencil, and while William looked on with the agony a mother feels when her babe is under the surgeon's knife, he clamped the writing stick in cold, stiff fingers and disfigured the satin-white surface with eccentric scribblings.

"They 'll know who it 's meant for," he said apologetically, "because I 'm here. What 's likely to happen after we get rid of the card?"

"I told you about hanging your hat on the rack, and disposing of your legs."

"I remember now," sighed Bill. "I 'll bet Maida's mother makes us clean our shoes before she lets us step on her parlor carpet."

Their pace had been getting slower and slower. The angle of inclination toward each other became more and more pronounced. But now William plucked up spirit to say:

"I 'll bet she won't. After we tell her that we 've come to call on her daughter and the company, she 'll treat us just like she does their preacher."

The thought of being treated like the preacher was at once so very alluring and so very terrible to Bill that he drew back and gasped,

"Let me out! You go on alone!"

William halted.

"Maida and the other girl 'll go upstairs and put on their best white dresses," he whispered. "We can be thinking up things to say till they come down. We 'll

get right up when they come in the parlor, and say them. Maida 's smart. It won't be the first time she ever had a boy call — lots of real grown-up young men are calling on her now. She 'll know what to do. When we get our remarks made, we 'll ask her to play."

"Play? She 's got so young-ladyfied she won't rip around and play in her best clothes — and on Sunday."

William's brows met almost savagely. But for the quaking in his knees he would have dismissed this floundering ally.

"The piano," he said abruptly. "I can't hang around here talking all day. Come on."

They drew in deep breaths and fell into lock-step, like prisoners entering a jail.

"We must stand by each other," whispered William.

"I will — if I can stand at all," murmured Bill huskily.

"Oh, Lord!"

They had rounded the big clump of evergreens, and found Mrs. Crawford placidly rocking on the front porch! Directed to mount steps and ring the bell, to lay cards upon the servant, how should one deal with a rosy-faced, plump lady of uncertain years in a rocking-chair? What should a caller lay upon her? A lion in the way could not have been more terrifying. The student of "Hints and Helps" plucked at the sleeve of his comrade.

"Let 's — let 's go back," he murmured.

But retreat was cut off. Mrs. Crawford had seen them.

"Howdy, boys, how are you?" she said, rocking peacefully.

The two stood before her like detected criminals.

"William, did your mother send you over to get that list for the Ladies' Aid? I 'm sorry, but I forgot all about it."

The taller boy, taken unaware, was utterly dumbfounded; and to Bill's dismay, he sank down on the lowest step of the porch, the westering sun full in his hopeless eyes. He sat on his cap.

"Mother does n't know — that is, I mean — mother does n't — or — she does n't care. Bill and I came to — we came to —"

"Why, William Harvey!" said Mrs. Crawford, sharply. "That sounds as though you meant that your mother did n't know where you were. You ought always to tell her, so she won't be anxious about you."

Anger supplied dogged persistence to the weakening William. He sat still and said nothing.

It was characteristic that Bill remained standing. He intended to walk up those steps according to plan and agreement, or go home. He accepted no compromise. Folding his straw hat into a battered cone, he watched anxiously for the delivery of the card. He was not sure what Mrs. Crawford's attitude might be, if it were laid on her. He bent down to his comrade.

"Go ahead," he whispered. "Lay the card."

William raised appealing eyes.

"In a minute. Give me time," he pleaded.

"Hi! Hi! Hi! Mars' Bill — Mars' Bill! Head 'em off!" sounded a yell; and Poly Bony came around the house in pursuit of two half-grown chickens.

"Help him, Billy," prompted Mrs. Crawford smartly. "You boys can stay to supper and have some of the chickens, if you help catch them."

Had Bill taken time to think, he might have reflected that gentlemen making formal calls seldom join in a chase after the main dish of the family supper. But he had neither time for this, nor to consult his new social authority. And the needs of Poly Bony were instant.

Bill flung himself sidewise, caught one chicken in his hat while Napoleon fell upon the other in the manner of a football player. Bill handed the pullet to the breathless negro, fearing that he had done something very much out of character, then pulled the reluctant Poly Bony forward to the steps.

"Poly Bony 's a servant," he whispered to William, who had sat rigid through the entire performance. "I helped him with the chicken and he 's got to stand gentle while you lay the card on — he 'd better."

Confronted by the act itself, William was suddenly aware that he knew not how to begin. He took refuge in dissimulation.

"Hush," he whispered back. "Don't you see Mr. Crawford 's going to read something to us?"

Hope flickered high in Bill's heart that the card

business had already been transacted while he was away on the chicken raid.

"Have you told 'em we came to call?" he inquired, under his breath.

William emitted a little moan, like a kitten in pain. The sun was still in his eyes. Bill plumped down beside him.

"Never mind the card — tell 'em," he urged.

"Tell 'em yourself."

"No — let 's cut and run."

"I — I think the worst of it 's over. When Maida sees us, she 'll —"

Mention of Maida stiffened Bill's spine. If it had been glorious to call upon her, how very terrible she would make it, should they attempt calling, fail, and the failure come to her knowledge. Some things were easier to endure than others; he resolved to stay till the call was made.

For half an hour the boys sat with drooping heads while Mr. Crawford read aloud, presumably to his wife and themselves, an article upon vegetarianism. It is no slur upon that humane and progressive doctrine to say that it disagreed with the two young men who had come to call. Finally, their captive eyes discerned Maida and her guest approaching along the sidewalk. With arms entwined, the two floridly blooming young things were whispering together and giggling. A caller, Bill dared not use his voice to shout nor his legs to go toward them. Suddenly he became aware that they were turning in at the side gate. They were passing the spot where he and Alan

had sat. With the hedonism of youth he gave it not one thought. They wandered up and down beneath blossoming branches where fruit had hung that other day. If they entered the house by the side door, he and William would have no opportunity to greet them in the manner of gallants, but Mrs. Crawford's keen glance was upon their flushing countenances.

"Did you boys really come on an errand?" she asked. "It 's Sunday, you know, and you 're a good deal dressed up — I don't want you to get to playing round here with Poly Bony and spoil your good clothes. I feel answerable to your mothers for that."

Bill's heart swelled with the rage of the misunderstood. Had the card been in his possession, he would, at that instant, have laid it on her without a qualm.

"What is it?" demanded the old gentleman a bit testily, desisting for a moment from his digestive gospel. Thus directly appealed to, there seemed no reason why Bill should not have risen and said with an urbane bow:

"I have come to call upon your daughter, sir."

What he did say was:

"Why — oh, yes, Mr. Crawford, Uncle Doc wanted me to ask you about the halter of the horse he bought from you Friday."

"Halter?" Mr. Crawford could scarcely credit his own ears, that a neighbor should discuss whose halter led home a purchased horse! Bill realized his awful mistake as the old gentleman went on, "Dr. Kirk

sent a halter over by the negro boy — but I should have furnished one had he not done so."

"Alter — halter — I don't know which it was Uncle Doc said. He didn't care much, anyhow," Bill floundered. "Maybe I just thought he wanted me to — and we were coming over to — William and I thought we'd just —"

A neighbor's boy squirming on the bottom step could not long hold Mr. Crawford's attention. His eyes went gravely back to the page, and his voice resumed its monotonous reading.

But Mrs. Crawford looked, and a twinkle brightened her eyes. She was not without a sense of humor, and also a twinge of sympathy made itself felt within her ample breast.

"Wait a minute, Father," she said; got up and trotted on short, fat ankles to the arbor, where the girls were.

There was plainly an argument. Had either of the boys been older in the ways of the sex they would have seen that Maida and her guest were after bigger game than themselves, and unwilling to recognize any pretentions they might put forward. They came at last, reluctantly, across the grass, glancing back, scanning the street, and the visitor looked curiously, almost angrily, at the uncomfortable youths, while Maida threatened to burst into giggles with every breath. William sat hard on his cap, and blushed silently. Bill twisted his hat into a three-cornered wreck.

"I think the girls want to hear you read," Mrs.

Crawford asserted when the three returned together.

Maida and her guest looked inconceivably young-ladyfied. The amount of starch in their costumes was marvelous, the number of bead strings, bangles, stick-pins and other minor junk which they had attached to their persons was something to be computed. Had the boys risen and attacked the situation, they might have made the crossing which good-hearted Mrs. Crawford perhaps expected. As it was, just at the moment the young ladies reached the steps, when introductions and other delicious formalities were in order, Jimmie Crane drove past in his buggy.

Maida turned and languished in the direction of the young physician. It was just as though they were little boys in short pants! She was barely able to come back from noticing him to say hastily, "Howdy, Bill? Howdy, William?"

"You children keep quiet, if you want to hear this," put in Mr. Crawford uncompromisingly. He looked over his spectacles at them. "Maybe the boys would rather run and play."

William swallowed hard and shook his head. Bill looked down, and was glad his boots were not polished like those of his cousin. It was now, in his mind, as desirable to get away without betraying their intention, as it had earlier been to carry that intention to a triumphant conclusion.

Launched on his hobby, the old man read on and on. The sun sank lower. The hills were red in the west as though a brush fire flamed behind their crests. William rubbed one shoe against the other to get rid

of the tell-tale shine. The resultant squeak sounded loud as a trumpet-call to his guilty ears. He stole a furtive glance at his companion in misery, and the dolor of Bill's countenance somewhat assuaged his anguish.

Bill was thinking of Maple Street and a certain pleasant white house set back in a green yard, past whose gate the two-plank sidewalk ran. He knew lamps were beginning to wink in the windows of the neighbors about, as though the houses said, "Our boys are all at home — but Bill Harvey 's out trying to call on the girls, and can't get anybody to understand what he 's up to." Oh, that he were walking down those two planks, drawing a stick across the pickets, lifting high happy feet which could turn in at that gate! He would n't care what the lamps said then. He would n't even mind if the whole Crawford family died laughing at him — if only some power would raise him up from that paralyzing spot and put him behind the safe barriers of his own home. The old man's voice lapsed into silence; the light was becoming too dim for his reading. Mrs. Crawford turned and called over her shoulder into the shadows of the big hall:

"You, Poly Bony! Put two extra plates on the supper-table."

The boys were afraid to look at each other, yet they sat so close as to be almost touching elbows, poor saplings, afraid to unlock branches for an independent moment of explanation or departure! They grew red from the tips of their ears down as far as any one

could see under their wilting collars. William felt the lump of wax come loose and slip along a cold spine. Had their intentions been known, this inferential invitation would have been most welcome. It was but to rise up and thunder out:

"We came to call on the young ladies."

They did not rise. They did not thunder out anything. Poly Bony brought a lamp and set it inside the window, and Mr. Crawford resumed his reading. Maida and her guest whispered and giggled till Mr. Crawford put down his magazine and gave them an awful look. Part of the time Bill thought they were exchanging murmured confidences of Jimmie Crane and the young minister, part of the time he hoped it was not worse — that they were not making fun of himself and William.

The supper bell rang. The family, evidently taking it for granted that the boys would follow, went in. Alone for the first time, William gave up.

"This ain't no use," he complained. "We ain't calling on anybody."

"Why did n't you lay the card?" demanded Bill fiercely. "Why did n't you say, 'We 've-just-dropped in-to-call-on-Miss-Maida-'n'-her-visitor. It 's-a-pleasant-evening. We-feel-we-must-be-going,' like you said you would? Then we could have lifted our hats and got away decently."

William showed no resentment.

"Oh, if it 's so easy, why did n't you do it yourself?" he groaned.

"Somebody 's coming," Bill muttered, hoarsely.

"Say it now. Say it quick. Say it and we 'll go."

The somebody proved to be Mrs. Crawford who advanced only as far as the end of the hall and said cheerfully:

"The idea of growing boys not coming to meals when the bell rings! I thought you would be in there ahead of us. Come on."

Even William realized that to shout back elaborate quotations from "Hints and Helps" would be inappropriate. And, clinging to their head-coverings as though these contained some charm whereby the owners might be rescued, the unhappy callers were herded into the dining-room. There were many things on the table that boys like. Beneath the influence of hot biscuits and honey, William was painting mental pictures of the big porch on a summer night after supper, and the hammock under the trees. He could see Maida, laughing as he swung her, while Bill conversed apart elegantly with the visiting young lady who treated him as a grown-up gentleman.

"Ask the girls to take a walk after supper," he whispered to his colleague. "We 'll make it yet."

Bill nodded with his mouth full; any brave act looked possible, viewed through the medium of the comforting warm food and the necessary delay. Both boys were becoming fairly cheerful, when Mrs. Crawford checked the biscuit plate on its rounds, and asked Bill how many his mother usually let him eat — with honey.

"I treat my neighbors' children just like I 'd want

children of my own treated," said she, placidly. "If your mothers let you eat all you want, say so, and I don't care; but if either of them is a little bit particular — and honey does give some children the stomach-ache — why, I 'd stop at six."

Still reeling from this blow, the boys finally rose from the table and found themselves somehow in the front room. During the usual Sunday evening singing Maida laughed till her mother threatened to send her to bed. William's card slipped from his hand and dropped, face up, on the floor. He fell upon it and tore it into infinitesimal pieces. Moving to another chair, his recovered hat still clutched in a death-grip, he inadvertently scattered this little shower of white fragments like stage-snow, and was stricken with horror at the thought that the pieces might be picked up in the morning and their original character recognized.

"That must be a love-letter," said Mrs. Crawford teasingly, in a pause of the music. "You boys are getting most old enough to think about beginning to call on the girls." Her eyes twinkled.

Bill growled like a stoned cur. William took a sudden dive into "Hints and Helps" and came up with,

"You flatter us, Mis' Crawford," pronouncing the prefix southern fashion.

Bill snickered out like a human boy. They all stared at him.

"It seems so funny to call her — Mis' Crawford," the lad of the freckles explained. "Suppose we —"

He broke off. Another moment and he would have mentioned that they came to call.

William who instantly guessed at what was in Bill's mind, turned white at the thought of what they had escaped. Suppose he had laid on the card and asked for Mis' Crawford?

"What 's the matter?" Maida asked.

Bill answered in a fairly natural tone. The air he had drawn into his lungs when he laughed at William seemed to relieve him from the numbing gentility which had bound his powers since he joined his cousin's plan.

"Nothing. I laughed because you laughed."

The singing went forward fitfully.

"It 's a very pleasant evening," remarked Mr. Crawford dreamily. He wrote poetry sometimes and it was printed in the Watauga *Herald,* with remember and December, childhood and wildwood, rhyming in it. "It makes me think of old times to have you children here playing about my knees of a summer evening."

The suffering society men looked at each other in the dim lamp-light with wan faces.

"I think it 's hot," said Bill resentfully.

"Warmest weather I ever experienced," corroborated William, and sighed.

Servants traipsed through the darkened yard going home for Sunday night. Mrs. Crawford went out and held some low-toned parley with them. Maida yawned with insulting enthusiasm. Presently both young ladies quietly disappeared. Mrs. Craw-

ford never returned to the parlor — evidently thinking that the girls would attend to the final amenities with their callers. They were left alone with old Mr. Crawford. They sat as though bound in their chairs, while the old man read in silence for a while. Finally, he closed his book, glanced about him, and observed, absently:

"So you boys were to spend the night?" Then, as he looked at their startled faces, "I 'm right, am I not? You are to spend the night?"

Oh, for courage to say, "Thank you, no. We 'll be going now. We just came over to call on Miss Maida and her company." But thought of how this would sound in face of the facts, the painful prepossession that they dared not say it because they *had* not said it, locked their lips. Their feet were lead. Their tongues seemed stiff, and quite too large for their mouths. Like creatures in a nightmare, they moved stiffly, one might have said creakingly, up the stairs, and received each — a bedroom candle!

"Good-night, boys. Good-night, children," and the absent-minded old man patted each young shoulder as it passed him with a kindly touch. They looked odd — but they were shy. What had Hester said to him about their staying all night? He was not quite clear; but he was certain that she had mentioned it; and he went softly on to his own room, as the two gurgled out some sounds which were intended for words, and dodged behind the bedroom door.

"They 've put us to bed!" William's blue eyes flashed fire. His nervous hands clutched at the collar

Bill had lent him. "That 's what I get for coming here with you, Bill Harvey!" and tears of humiliation quenched the fire.

In his turn Bill showed no resentment.

"I 'm worried about my mother," confessed William, seating himself on the edge of the bed, and running his hands into his hair.

"Will she come after you?" whispered Bill, almost wishing she would.

"No," returned William dismally. "I told her I was going to stay all night at your house. But she 'll be sure to find out."

"And then she 'll tease you 'most to death."

"I only wish she would," groaned William. "She 'll be sorry for me — and that 's a lot worse."

"My mother 'd never make a fuss about my calling on the girls!" blustered Bill contemptuously.

"Calling on girls! Have we called on any girls?" demanded the goaded William.

"Not exactly — yet," admitted Bill reluctantly.

"Well, if you 're going to try again in the morning, maybe we 'd just as well lie down and get some sleep," sighed William.

"I wish I was at home," asserted Bill, without any danger of contradiction. "I never want to see any one named Crawford again. I don't want to stay here calling all night to make one call. What did you ask me to come with you for, anyhow?"

"It was n't my fault. If there 'd been a servant to put the card on — if Poly Bony had come to the door

in the first place — everything would have gone off all right."

Bill turned hopelessly from these might-have-beens.

"What can we say in the morning?" he asked with rather unnecessary cruelty. "My 'rich stream of conversation' has run dry."

"They've let the dog out," remarked William, absently. "Will he bite?"

"Who — Watch? Will he bite? Just chews up people for fun," returned Bill gloomily. "He might let me pass, because he knows me so well; but he'd sure tackle you — and anyway, he'd make an awful fuss."

"You would n't go without me!" William clutched his partner in misery with feverish energy. "Come on — let's go to bed. Mr. Crawford asked us to stay, and he's the one here — he's got the say-so. It is n't anybody's business what we came for."

"We'll slip off our shoes and lie down till Poly Bony ties up the dog in the morning," agreed Bill. "Then we can get away before any of the family is around."

Oh, youth — youth — youth, with its rash promises! Worn out with misery, the boys slept heavily. The first sound that either heard in the morning was Poly Bony hammering upon their bedroom door. They shrank guiltily, and looked into each other's eyes.

"Let's pretend we ain't here, and he'll go away," breathed William.

But Poly Bony was made of sterner stuff. He rat-

tled the knob. He turned it. He put in a black face with a grin which divided it from ear to ear.

"Cady say I mus' call dem fool boys to breakfus'," he announced. "I never name you-all dat," he announced. "Cady, she say it."

"Breakfast!" echoed Bill in a daze.

"Yessuh, breakfus'," reasserted Napoleon, coming entirely into the room and looking curiously about him. "Ain't you-all boys never been to bed?" wrapping his arms about his shoulders, and shaking with silent ecstasies of mirth. The two threw themselves upon him and ejected him.

"Sent up a servant to call us to breakfast," ejaculated William. "If only they 'd sent their old servant to the door, in the first place, all this would n't 'a' happened. I 'm just that way when I get thrown off the track, Bill. You know how it was when I tried to repeat those things out of my book to you yesterday. I knew 'em by heart; but when I got interrupted, I had to go clear back to the beginning."

"Does that mean that you 're still hanging around here to begin over and make a call?" asked Bill darkly. "I won't go down to breakfast if you are."

William brightened a little as he saw Bill becoming wordy in his rage.

"I dare you to walk downstairs and say, 'We-just-dropped-in-to-call-on-Miss-Maida-'n'-her-company,'" he challenged.

"I — Oh — I —" began Bill. "Darn it all! there goes the second bell. We may as well trot down."

"Don't leave me, Bill," pleaded William. "I can't stay here — and I can't go down."

The tone was hysterical. Without another word the stockier boy took his companion by the arm and marched him down the stairs.

"We may get a chance yet to call some, out on the porch, or in the arbor, before we go," he suggested, by way of putting some spine into his cousin.

An emphatic bell rang when they were half-way down the stairs. Clutching their hats, they slunk into the dining-room. Even Mr. Crawford seemed to notice something unusual in their bearing, as they settled into the chairs assigned to them. He asked them kindly if they had slept well.

It was plain that his wife had been posting him as to her understanding of these young men. The state of affairs gave an electric hilarity to the atmosphere. Poly Bony traveled from the sideboard to the table, trembling like chocolate pudding. Cady insisted on bringing in the cakes herself, and grinned as she whisked her starched blue skirts in and out of the dining-room. A dimple showed itself at the corners of Maida's mouth without her having to screw up that feature. She giggled till Bill heard Cady whisper:

"Now you got one dem snickerin' spells ag'in. You gwine bust yo' dress buttons off in de back ef you don't mind."

As the spirits of those about them mounted, the hearts of the two youths sank — if it was like this among the Crawfords what would it be in the world at large, when their failure to connect intention with

result became town talk? Bill bit fiercely upon an unoffending batter-cake, and resolved to make a call single-handed before he left the house.

They went out of the dining-room, their hats as ever pressed to their breasts. With no volition of their own, their uncertain young legs carried them to the porch. The Crawford family and household followed like small boys after a circus procession. When the two turned, at bay, yet with nothing between them and liberty but a hypnotism of their own suggestion, they saw the black faces of the servants peering over the family shoulders.

Bill was the boy to have drawn courage from the desperation of their case, and made some decent if not glorious ending. But Fate, just around the corner of the big, white house, had one more move to make ere the play was his. She put forward her pawn at this, the psychological moment, in the astonishing and humiliating form of a shirt boy, that figure known to the southern village, a creature who may be described for the benefit of those not informed, as a pickaninny clad only in a long, coarse cotton shirt. This being, son of the Harvey cook, grandchild of Aunt Candace, dripping with humiliation — shedding insult and ignominy, by the mere fact of his use, as the deadly upas-tree sheds its poison — this shameful ambassador, with every gaze fixed on him, and in such silence as has been described, emerged briskly from the angle of the veranda and bolted forth his message:

"Yo' ma say" — his bulging eyes rolled impartially toward William and Bill — "ef yo' don' come home

she gwine come after yo' — an' cut yo' into inch pieces wid a rawhide when she git yo'. Dat jest what she say."

It may here be parenthetically explained that this messenger had by no means been sent on his errand, but was self-appointed.

Instantly there was a silence that, Bill thought, could have been sawed into blocks, a silence that was vociferous with meaning. The two elders, the young ladies, the servants — all vibrated in one very live current of intelligence. The spell was dissolved. Bill lifted his head and filled his chest with the first free breath it had known since William tempted him and he fell. His lips parted, the brown eyes glinted.

"We came to call on the girls," he ejaculated very loud.

"To call on the girls!"

A roar went up from white and black alike — a roar that shook the vine leaves on the porch. As though such a book as "Hints and Helps" had never existed, William shot for the gate. Bill stood alone.

Maida's high, offensive giggle, topping all the others, insulted his ears. He felt that some demonstration of his manhood — he knew not what — must be made. He advanced a step. The laughter suddenly ceased. Mrs. Crawford half rose from the rocker into which she had dropped. The others craned forward. White as paper, shaking with inexpressible rage, Bill caught and kissed the tittering girl violently, noisily, before them all.

Then Poly Bony, Cady, and the cook fled — they

dared not trust their feelings; even the visiting young lady clasped her hands over her face and sniggered; Mr. Crawford roared applaudingly; and Mrs. Crawford frankly collapsed once more into her rocking-chair, bubbling with mirth, crying out:

"Good for you, Bill. Seems you did know how to call on girls, after all."

But Bill, paying no attention, wheeled and walked swiftly toward the gate. He had served his novitiate. He would never be afraid again. Girls! he could "call on 'em so easy now that he would n't care anything about it." But William, with the thing yet in his system — William was still in for one of life's lessons.

XIII

HIS FALSE LIGHT

THOUGH Bill had learned all there was to know about calling on girls, and William had yet wisdom to acquire in regard to the matter, the effect upon the two boys was logical. Bill dropped the subject, being unripe for it. William began almost immediately to make more or less successful calls of the same sort, and it was noticeable that upon these he did not desire the attendance of his cousin. It made a noticeable division between the boys — noticeable because there was no quarrel, simply a curious drifting apart. According to Bill's wisdom, enough of a thing was enough, and when William elected to spend three evenings of each week in some girl's parlor, or on some girl's porch, as the season favored, while the remaining nights were largely given over to preparation for these occasions, it almost completely bereft Bill of William.

So matters ran for more than a year, the difference in their lives accentuating even more when the older boy began to study medicine in his stepfather's office. A year of that and he was engaged. He told Bill about the engagement, but in a way that marked again the reversal of their position toward each other. He

made Bill feel as though some game, some trial of strength, had been pulled off in which William was victor, and he himself not even a contestant.

It would be untruthful to say that William's engagement did not occupy a considerable amount of Bill's attention. It did. He thought about it more than he wanted to. William seemed to have received the girl and the engagement, complete, from the hand of his mother. Aunt Amelia believed in long engagements and young marriages. She was chaperoning this betrothal of William's as she has chaperoned his whole life. Bill recoiled from the spectacle. And yet he could not remain forever a boy, and he was aware that even to himself an engagement without his mother's full comradeship would be shorn.

When he had come to be eighteen years old, with the height of a man, but the eager boy's soul still looking out of his red-brown eyes, he found that others beside William refused to stay back in the boys' world. They would not keep step. They went on ahead and plunged into grown-up affairs, blissful or disastrous. There was Maida Crawford, who having been reinstated, finally did run away from boarding-school with a fellow who played the fiddle in the orchestra of the Gunter's Springs Opera House. She came home less than a year later, divorced, with her maiden name restored, but with a halo of romance or disgrace about her according to the eyes that viewed it.

It was not the divorce, but the man she had married — the whole performance — William said. Aunt Amelia, who had never quite gotten over being a rec-

tor's daughter-in-law and widow, discussed the matter very exhaustively with Ruth Harvey — and Bill, lying on a lounge in the next room, supposed to be asleep after a baseball game, heard every word.

"They say she can't get along at home at all. I don't know that she ever could, but now she quarrels with her mother all the time."

So far Aunt Amelia's tone, thin, cutting, self-righteous. Then his mother spoke:

"That 's too bad; the girl needs help now, more than ever. I should think Mrs. Crawford would feel herself to blame for Maida's unfortunate marriage."

"Well, they 're not on speaking terms, my dear — think of that! — a mother and daughter living in the same house and not speaking to each other! Mr. Crawford 's found it so uncomfortable that he 's going to set up Maida in a little millinery business down on Sixth Street. She won't even live at home. I call it scandalous for a girl of her age."

"I don't see what else the poor man can do," said Ruth pacifically.

"But think of it — she 'll be horribly talked about. I shan't put my foot in the store," said virtuous Mrs. Amelia.

Bill was hot with rage at her and glowed again with a fine satisfaction at his mother's reply.

"Oh, do you take it that way? Why, I was thinking of making a special point of buying anything I could of her, and stopping to visit a little. Poor child, what is she to do, if the right sort of people won't be friendly?"

"Well, you may do that yourself, but you would n't want to have a child of yours intimate there," urged Mrs. Amelia. "I would n't have William or Bessie associating with that girl for anything. Girl — she 's a woman — she 's twenty-five years old, if she 's a day. They 've always storied about her age, and kept her in short dresses until she was over twenty. If what you call the right sort of people don't take a stand in such matters, I don't see how women of that kind are to be kept in their places. You have a son to think of, yourself, Ruth."

"Oh, Bill," laughed his mother, easily. Perhaps she would n't have been so completely at ease had she known who was listening. "Bill hardly counts in a matter like this. He 's just a big boy still, Amelia. He was n't noticing the girls quite as young as your William."

"Well, don't forget I warned you," said the doctor's wife, and Bill listened no more. He did n't need to listen further. The deed was done.

He went out of his way to go past that little store on Sixth Street. Maida was alone with the workmen trying to get things in shape. There was a shop below stairs and rooms above where she intended to live. At first her father, whose pet she had always been, and who was furnishing the money for this venture, stole in to help her, poor unhappy old fellow, troubled in his mind because his wife would be angry if she knew of his siding with the girl. Bill and he worked together, the boy finding the old gentleman's gratitude very pleasant. They put up shelves

and Bill helped to place the bits of furniture which the father persuaded the alienated mother to allow Maida to have from home. No doubt Mrs. Crawford gave these on his promise to stay away from the millinery shop. Anyhow he did stay away after a time, but since Bill had taken to spending all his spare hours there the old man was not missed.

Maida had never been pretty, except with the universal beauty of youth and gently-reared femininity; but now her experiences, such as they were, had set a halo of romance about her and had sharpened her wits to make the most of such advantages as she had. She drew liberally from her stock, and was always strung with small ornaments and draped with scarves and veils in a way that bewildered and fascinated Bill. Had he known it, she was beginning to paint. Just at this time, too, the young woman's need being desperate, she was sending out her subjective call in every direction for some sort of rehabilitation. She clung for the present to such ideals — or at least such appearances — as she had been brought up in. The woman who took the other side of the little shop and put in a manicure and hair-dressing department did things that she was not yet ready for, had friends about which Maida felt it necessary to be secret. Bill, coming into this atmosphere, was whirled along, until he stood openly as her champion, her hope, the one who promised everything. He could n't leave her alone while she needed him. When the shop was in order and there were no more all day sessions of hard work, he took to calling in a little parlor he and

Maida had cut off with a big screen at the back of the store.

Somehow he had n't told his mother of the new affair, though the first strong impulse toward helping Maida came from his certainty that she would approve. He spoke to the girl about it, and she begged him not to. He was n't exactly pleased with her hysterical,

"She 'll take you away from me — she will! And I can't spare you."

When he had explained that his mother would do nothing of the sort, that she would be as much a friend as himself, the girl still insisted and Bill left the matter to time, which would certainly bring two such women together.

He talked baseball to Maida, camping trips, all a healthy big boy's interests, and she pretended to find them interesting also. She would give him a low seat close beside hers, and lean forward breathlessly, lips apart, listening. She made little ejaculatory comments that would once have annoyed him exceedingly. She did n't play young for Bill. She showed him that she was a woman saddened by a painful past, but trusting him only out of all the world. She called him a splendid man and told him she was proud of him.

It was a heady brew for a chap of his age, even though the siren was only Maida Crawford, with whom he had gone to school. So much water had gone under the bridge since those days that there was no difficulty in seeing about her the glamour that sur-

rounded a woman, a grown-up lady. She had been married and — and talked about. Bessie McAllister, the girl William was engaged to, seemed a silly child beside her.

"Aw — a fellow has luck sometimes," Bill would murmur in deprecation of her broadest flattery.

"Some fellows have luck all the time — and in everything," Maida whispered.

Her eyes were on her fan. He wished she would brush it against his hand again, as she had a moment before.

"Say," he flung the invitation about as suavely as he might have cast a brickbat. "Would you like to go to the next ball-game with me?"

"Oh, Bill — I 'd love it. But I was afraid you would n't want me — now — as things are. How good and sweet and dear you are to ask me. Oh, Bill!"

He reddened under the tan, and got suddenly to his feet, thanking his stars that none of the boys overheard such a speech as that about him and yet a little regretful that they could not know.

"I 'll come past for you Monday afternoon, then," he said almost gruffly. "I reckon I won't see you again until Saturday night. A lot of us fellows are going to tramp out to Gunter's Springs."

Maida dropped her fan the length of its chain. She clutched his arms suddenly.

"Bill," she began, then seemed doubtful whether or not to utter what was in her mind. The boy regarded her with some surprise. Finally, looking up into his face, she said very low indeed, "We 've been

schoolmates. You 've always been my friend — my true friend."

There struggled in Bill a sudden impulse to say that he had been much more, to swear that he had adored her from the beginning of time — yet something at the back of his head was mildly surprised and aware that this would n't be a genuine expression of his feelings.

"I —" he was beginning some folly when her palm closed his mouth and remained against his lips rather uncomfortably while she continued to speak.

"You know Gunter's Springs is where *it* happened," she half whispered. "Bill — if you hear anything against me over there, you won't believe it — will you? They 're the meanest people — and His Folks live there."

Here was the most direct appeal she could have made to Bill at that age and in that frame of mind — something to fight. The wretch — the villain — who had brought her to this pass, lived at Gunter's Springs — or had lived there. His tribe infested that part of the world. Bill's broad shoulders squared themselves, Maida's hand dropped away from his lips, slipping down across his coat collar, and somehow finding his.

"I 'm going to take care of you," he asserted. "I 'll be what you called me — a true friend. I 'll be proud to take you around anywhere. I 'll bring my mother to see you. You got to let me — now."

Perhaps the last thing Maida Crawford in her present situation wanted was Ruth Harvey bothering

about where she attempted to put the comether on Bill. But she only said,

"Don't do that, dear." (Bill was under the hallucination that the "dear" slipped out by mistake.) "I think your mother's the sweetest, dearest, loveliest woman I ever knew — it's because you're like her that you can be such a true friend to me in my sorrow — but don't bring her here — yet."

"Well — I won't then," cried the boy, and withheld the information that he knew his mother intended to come anyhow. It would be a delightful surprise for Maida.

He was leaving. In the stress of the moment's emotion, Maida evidently forgot herself for she leaned almost against him, holding up her face exactly in the manner of a child waiting to be kissed.

And he had kissed Maida, that first time at choir practice, and afterward on the occasion of the call, he had kissed her boldly before everybody. But somehow in this new phase he was withheld. This was a woman saddened by bitter experience — to touch her hand sufficed to set his head spinning. He pressed her fingers now until the numerous rings hurt. He was beginning to be a little afraid of her, and very much more afraid of himself. There is, at that age, a divinity which hedges in woman — a veil woven of the glory of the unknown. To rend this was beyond the boy. Bill pushed her back into its protecting mysteries and left her.

"Good-night," he ejaculated thickly, and hurried out into the quiet street.

He stumbled toward home, unseeing. For him the sky was full of low-swinging moons that looked at him with Maida's eyes — old, old moon, dear boy, such as shone on ancient gardens where young lovers lingered to whisper long good-nights; the moon of Romeo and Rosalind — for Bill, the moon of Juliet had not yet arisen.

His mother had sat long by the little table in the sitting-room. Now, having finally gone upstairs, undressed, and drawn a kimono over her gown, she fluttered uneasily about her chamber, going every few minutes to the window and peering around the shade. The editor of the *Herald* was reading late, a lamp on the stand beside his couch.

"Better come to bed, Ruth; the boy 'll be in presently," Bill's father offered the customary masculine comfort and admonition.

"Yes, dear," said the little woman softly, not at all as signifying assent but only to make courteous acknowledgment that she heard the kindly advice.

There was silence again. Once more Ruth Harvey lifted the curtain and peeped out. The way she stood, patient, mute, watchful, changed the man's mood. He hunched the sheet around his neck and grumbled out in Bill's own consolatory voice,

"You 're worrying about his calling on the milliner girl. I 'm sorry I told you. Every boy has to go through a dozen such affairs before he gets to the right one."

"Ye-es," she spoke as though to herself, her mother

insight traveling straight to the danger line; "but he may not be left to blunder safely — through. He might be — caught!"

The father did not turn this aside with his customary optimism.

"Too bad I worried you," he said. "I 've done all that can be done at present, I think. When William came to me — there 's an old-headed chap for you — I went straight to Bill —"

"Oh," breathed the mother in a soft little gasp of dismay, "I did n't know you had spoken to him."

"I did n't say anything imprudent," asserted James Harvey, and you could see plainly how he was father to a Bill — not a William. "In fact, I was very diplomatic. I made some remarks about silly entanglements, and he caught on very promptly. At the back of his head he knows he 's making a fool of himself — they always do."

"James," began the wife wistfully, "we 've tried to agree exactly about our boy — but you often think I 'm too lenient. If anything goes wrong in this matter —"

"I 'd never blame you," said the man on the bed.

"No, I feel sure you would n't — I 'd rather you did, than manhandle my boy — even though you thought it was for his good. You 've had one side of his training, and I 've had another." She returned to the whimsical contention which always floated in the relationship. "You 've been very anxious to develop all the Bill there was in him, but he has to grow up and be a William some time — and — love — and that 's where maybe I can be of more use to him."

"Honey," the voice that spoke now was Bill's own, "Heaven help the man that thinks he knows more than God teaches a good mother about her children. You can take this for your comfort, Ruth; if any one saves your boy from that sort of folly, it 'll be you. He 's got some confidence left in you. I 'm sorry to say that I 've lost out with him."

"Oh, no, James — oh, no," Ruth Harvey deprecated swiftly, "you 're the strong one. A boy loves his mother a little the most perhaps, and respects his father a little the most — is n't that the way of it?"

"Could n't say," said James Harvey musingly. "I only know that when I tackled Bill he went right up in the air — told me he was n't going to stand by and see any friend of his unfairly treated, and that the reason of his loyalty was that he was like you. 'I 'm just my mother over again — everybody always said so,' he told me, and glared like a bull-terrier at everything I mentioned afterward. Bill doing the sentimental is somewhat on the order of a ballet in winter flannels — and he attributes his turn for it to you."

"There he is now," she cried softly and ran downstairs to open the door for her son.

Bill came in noisily, blissfully unconscious that everybody else was not eighteen, in love, and eager to wake and meditate upon the sweetness thereof. Somehow he was moved to extra tenderness when his mother met him, and stood, looking up into his face, a perplexed little figure with soft, rumpled, graying hair, and a tender, doubtful smile about her lips.

"Did you sit up just for me?" he began genially.

Then with the fretful caretaking of males for the women of their household, "It 'll make you sick to be up so late." He looked down at her indulgently, adding, "Say, Mother, I believe you don't know that I 'm over three years old."

She stood, dumb, troubled, afraid to speak.

"What 's the matter?" he questioned with a sharp side glance so like his father that she realized his manhood and her worried maternity quailed before it. "You don't mean to say you were uneasy about me, Mother. I was calling on a girl and she ought to have told me it was getting late. I got to talking and never noticed. Got anything to eat around the house?"

Somewhat reassured by this wonted query, Mrs. Harvey meekly took up the serving attitude, and ministered to his corporeal needs while her heart ached to save him a bad stumble in the dark. But words swelled and died on her lips like foreshortened waves running weakly to a barren beach. Bill got up from the table and she gathered courage to speak.

"Who — who were you calling on this evening?" she faltered. "If you don't mind I 'd like to talk to you a little about one of the girls you —"

He was drinking at the refrigerator, making a serious, absorbing business of pouring water down his brown, muscled young throat.

"Hey?" He came toward the table and set the empty glass on it.

"Bill, are you — have you anything to tell mother?"

His eyes brightened.

"I will have pretty soon," he said. "I 'm sure glad you 're what you are, and not like Aunt Amelia."

She stood dumb, trembling from head to foot, somehow aware that her inquiry had crystallized a purpose in her boy that might not have hardened into act quite so soon if she had let him alone. Dare she say one word more? As she hesitated, he went on.

"William and me and Ted Winsdale and Newt Green have got to get off early in the morning. The grub and things we got packed 'll be all right. We got to start before day. Know where my old shoes are? I 'll need those pants you mended for me. I reckon we won't be gone more 'n three days — we aim to make it in three. Ain't feeling worried about the trip, are you?"

He bent his tall head and examined her countenance anxiously, uncomprehendingly; and he pounded her shoulder a little under the impression that he was giving a caress. But she knew through all her being that a strange guest had entered the heart of her son and shut one door upon her — knew that it was vain to struggle against the giant that held that door closed.

She reached up and kissed him silently. His feelings were alert to-night. In a considerate voice he asked, "Is Dad asleep? I ought n't to have made so much noise when I came in. I 'd better take off my shoes. He says I sound like a boat-load of horses coming down the gangway when I go upstairs."

She left him sitting on the lower step to remove his shoes lest their clatter disturb his father's sleep. The irony of it made her smile.

XIV

HIS TRAMP

ILL wakened that first morning out, long before it was light. This was extraordinary, for he had got up early to make a start, and tramped from dawn until dusk the previous day with somewhat more than the required twenty-five pounds upon his back, and only a brief halt at noon. He had felt funny all day — not as though he were going to be sick, but curiously set apart from his companions — even from William. He had thought of Maida all day too — or rather he had thought of the fact of there being such a person in the world — if one may make the distinction. His mind did not run upon details, but grasped hazily the fact of beauty in distress, persecuted womanhood, and a champion to the rescue. Why, even last night when he would ordinarily have dropped down in his tracks and slept dreamlessly for eight or ten hours, he lay between his snoring companions, his toes to the camp-fire, above his head the big blue-black vault spangled with stars, and, later, haunted by a late moon. He wakened and slept, and wakened again, in a fashion quite unknown to his healthy youth. And sleeping,

waking, his mind was marched through by that same procession — the cruel, jeering world, the girl who needed a strong arm to protect her, the man who meant to see her through.

How wonderful it was. How strange that Maida Crawford — just Maida Crawford — should grow up and be a married woman — a wronged woman, a beautiful soul cruelly wronged — and that she should care for him. For care she did — he admitted that to himself in the security of the darkness. She must be in love with him. A glow of generosity swept into his soul at the thought. When he went back home he would propose, and they would be engaged. He would give her a ring — the best he could afford. There was the money that his great-aunt left him when he was a baby. It had been to buy him a watch when he came of age, but father had kept it in the bank until it would buy several watches. He 'd speak to fath — no, he would n't — he 'd ask his mother about it.

He felt himself set apart from those around him, mere boys who would grow up and simply marry ordinary, commonplace girls because they fell in love with them. His was a destiny luminous, peculiar, rich in emotions which they could not comprehend. Dreamily he wondered if William had not put his father up to interfering. William was so superior about his Bessie, and his engagement, and his mother's approving. Well, but look here — nobody had found out what it was that Bill's mother would say. He 'd go to her when he got back. He 'd have to go to her

about the ring anyhow. Of course he could buy one on the instalment plan. Poly Bony did that for a girl that he quarreled with, and she would n't send the ring back. Bill almost giggled in the darkness when he remembered how doleful it was to Poly Bony to finish paying for that ring on her perfidious black finger. His mother had spoken then about its being a bad way to buy things.

He did n't think that he had actually slept, but he seemed to come out of these musings into a chill dawn in the woods, roused by a husky whisper. Over at the camp-fire, two black figures crouched and blew upon the coals — William and — yes, that other was Gid Berryhill, a boy from Gunter's Springs. He was a younger brother of that Berryhill who had played the fiddle, and had been Maida Crawford's husband for less than a year. Bill shut his eyes and wished he was at home.

"Yes, she did," Bill heard the Berryhill boy saying in a raucous undertone. "She ran after Myron something scandalous, because she thought he had money. Grandfather always did promise to leave him the farm. Then, right after they were married, grandfather died and did n't leave Myron a thing. He was mad because Myron married her. Then she up and left him. She told him why, and she let him get the divorce. No she did n't — she could n't get any divorce. He had n't done anything to her. Yes, he drinks — but he did n't so much until she got hold of him. He 's worse than ever now. Father and mother feel awful about it."

"Hush!" It was William's voice. He had apparently seen the movement of Bill's shoulders as he hunched the blankets over them and lay down.

Breakfast, with the Berryhill boy present, was not exactly a festive meal to Bill. William had made coffee, and every member of the party was allowed to have as much meat as he was willing to hack off for himself. It is no joke, cutting bacon with a pocket-knife. Bill breakfasted lightly. After they were fed he found with some dismay that they were to take their dinner at the Berryhill place. He would have begged off, but the reason was one he could not give, so he made an unusually silent member of the party that sat on the broad back porch and let patient, tired-faced Mrs. Berryhill wait on them. He was thankful that the meal went through without any mention of the son who had gone West, or of his divorced wife. It was after they were leaving, and Mrs. Berryhill stepped from the back porch with a crock of cookies in her arm, that the word came.

"I expect you young fellows would like these to finish up on," she observed as she set them down on the well curb. "I know my boy Myron never can get enough of them."

William, the correct, thanked her and said,

"What do you hear from Myron? Where is he, Mrs. Berryhill?"

Tears came into the faded eyes.

"Not very good news," she replied plaintively, eager to talk to a sympathetic listener. "That girl's been the ruin of him. I suppose you boys are ac-

quainted with her, being from Watauga, and I want to warn you against her."

There was an awkward silence. Then Bill spoke, very red, torn mightily between a natural sympathy for the woman who was feeding him delectable cookies and his recent infatuation.

"Miss Maida Crawford is a friend of mine," he remarked briefly.

Again that awful silence. Mrs. Berryhill broke it this time.

"Well, I hope I 'm a Christian woman," she said finally. "I mean to forgive and forget; but when I think of my poor boy — and see any other boy —"

She turned and walked away toward the house. Bill, his tanned cheek crimson, his brown eyes blazing, flung the cooky he had taken as far as he could send it, disregarded the walk and stepped across a flower-bed; jumped the fence and strode away down the road. Gid Berryhill was aghast. William gazed rather dolefully after his cousin's broad, retiring back.

"I wonder if he 's so mad that the trip home 'll be spoiled for all of us," the conservative one suggested.

They meekly took up Bill's traps which he had flung aside in his rage, and followed in his footsteps. When they overtook the run-away they found him unexpectedly genial.

"Aw, shucks — what 's the use?" he ejaculated half sadly, half smilingly, as he shouldered his own burden. "I ain't got any grouch at any of you fellows. Women are always running each other down

that way. The old, ugly ones just hate the young beautiful ones — it says so in all the books."

For the rest of the trip nobody was better company than Bill. He was going back. He was going to get that ring for Maida. He was going to see Maida and his mother the sort of friends that would put an end to all these slanders. William drew in close to his cousin and spoke in an undertone.

"I 'm sorry if anything Gid or his mother said hurt your feelings."

"Hurt my feelings," echoed Bill, "well, they ain't that tender."

"Oh," William gave the syllable a circumflex full of meaning. "We were all afraid that you were getting decidedly tender in a certain direction. I 'm glad it is n't true."

"See here, William," Bill paused in the way, facing his cousin, and spoke on a deeper note, "you let that business alone. I forgive you for feeling a little sore. I remember that you were always sweet on Maida."

"I never was," William denied in a scandalized tone.

"Huh," ejaculated Bill, hunching his pack higher and starting forward. "It seems to me that I remember a fellow that got me to go calling there a few years ago and then would hardly speak to me for a month because I kissed her before 'em all — and he was afraid to. It seems to me I remember that."

"Well, of course," explained William, "we made fools of ourselves and stayed all night, and I was a

little jealous that you had the sand to wind up with a flourish."

"Exactly," agreed Bill. "You were jealous. And how was it when you filled out a card with some very tender sentiments and put your name at the head of 'em, and were only willing that it should stand for my name because you said I 'd saved your life? You were jealous then, were n't you?"

"Oh — but —" William floundered. How was he to explain to this absurd young barbarian the difference between such silly, childish emotions as that, and the feelings a man really has for a girl like Bessie, for instance?

"Yes, and a good while before that, too," Bill resumed with great directness, "when we used to spell down, you were just sick about Maida Crawford — crazy about her. You always have been."

"Bill," said William solemnly, "some day you 'll feel toward some girl in a way that 'll make you understand."

"Um-m," murmured Bill, mysteriously, "maybe I will. Maybe I 'm feelin' that way right now. How do you know I ain't?"

During the days of Bill's absence Ruth Harvey went about her work, a haunted woman. Whenever she was alone in the house, a small shadow bobbed at her knee and followed after her steps — the little boy that was. She could hear the voice that babbled on all day, like a rapid, purling brook, mounting now and again to a fluty, liquid clamor as a stone checks its course; she could see his curly head and uplifted eyes,

his small, eager, asking hands; but when she would have clasped the baby sweetness and held it close to her sore heart — the little shadow was only a shadow.

The tiny creature who had been the core of her heart, was now part of that strong, mysterious man-child, who could wreck its life. Maybe she would have done better to manage as Amelia had, and keep her boy close to her — even tied by apron strings. To whom should she go — with whom dared she counsel now? Not Bill's father — she saw that. Not his grandfather — the Reverend William held ideas so strict that they would have been mainly applicable to the upbringing of Seraphim and Cherubim. Her perplexity was answered by the darkening of her door, the rolling in of Aunt Candace.

"Miss Rufe," said the big black woman, when she was finally settled comfortably, her palm leaf fan waving, the basket she had brought with a suit of Bill's Poly Bony had brought her to press in it, disposed by her feet, "I des' drapped in to have a little talk wid you 'bout Mars' Bill and dat Crawfud gal."

"Yes, Aunt Candace, I wish you 'd tell me anything you know about it. Say what you like. I 'll be glad."

"Co'se you will, Miss Rufe — ain't you got sense? Ev'body in de town sayin' dat she g'wine git him sho'; but I ain't so sartin myse'f, 'caze I been a-thinkin' 'bout you."

"If I did n't like the match, what could I do?" inquired Mrs. Harvey with a little half smile.

"Do? You could do a-plenty. Mars' Bill, when

de time come, des' wusship de groun' yo' feets trodds on — dat 's what he do. But a boy in love is a mighty hawd thing to han'le. Don't I know? Dat Poly Bony mighty nigh got hisself hitched up to de yaller gal what cyarved Zack Elder wid a razzor. Yassum. I broke dat up — an' Poly Bony don't know to dis day."

"How did you do it?" asked Mrs. Harvey, willing to learn even from this humble source of any possible defense for her boy.

"I went to see de gal. I made her 'quaintance. I told her dat Poly Bony was fittified — dat he been fittified fum de time he was a baby. Dat he liable to have 'em come on any time, and fall in de fiah, or break de furniture. Dey was some trufe in it — he did have monst'ous kickin' spells when he was little."

She leaned back in her chair, chuckling. Ruth Harvey smiled, too.

"Honey," resumed the old negress urgently, "you cain't tell what on airth you do want to do 'til you go see dat gal. Putt on yo' bunnit dis minute and go have a talk widder. She got one divorsh, mebbe she 'll leave go o' Mars' Bill befo' she takes holt — ain't no tellin'. You go see."

Candace was rising to make her adieus when in burst the heir of the house, dirty, disreputable, tattered, and weary, from his three days' tramp, yet with a soft fire in his brown eyes, and a note of eagerness in his young voice.

"Hello, Aunt Candace," he greeted, when he had kissed his mother. "Poly Bony got his cab yet?"

"He has dat, Mars' Bill, an' yo' grandpa lettin' him have de kerrige-house for to keep it in."

"Is there plenty of hot water? Did my laundry get back? D' you know what became of my red tie?" He fulminated these inquiries in swift succession as he ran toward his own room.

Ruth followed, full of her new purpose — to see Maida Crawford before he did.

"How tanned you are, Billy. How well you look. Did you have a good time?"

"Um-m. Bully. Oh, here the ties are."

"Going out to-night?" the inquiry came tremulously. "Saturday night? Are n't you tired?"

"Yep," responded Bill, largely. But whether he assented that he was tired or was going out did not appear in words. His actions spoke for themselves. "Gee, but that laundry 's rotten," he remarked. "I wish I 'd got Aunt Candace to do me a shirt. Poly Bony was going to press my suit. Oh — he did."

Mrs. Harvey's intuition warned her not to inquire into these matters, to pass over the fretfulness of her boy. She set out Bill's supper with her own hands and waited on him. She even managed to eat a bite with him, chatting all the time like the good comrade she meant to be always to him. Yet all the while her soul was watching back of her eyes, and she was wondering if she was too late. After supper she sat while he shaved himself and brushed his hair, anxiously inquiring if she did n't think it was a little too long. Choking back the tears that wanted to come, as she looked at the soft young beard of manhood on the

cheek of her baby of yesterday, she put a shaking, futile hand on the brown mop.

"I 've saved one of your yellow curls," she said almost defiantly. "How I did hate to cut them off. If I 'd had my way you 'd be going like Sampson still."

Bill laughed at her indulgently.

"They made a good handle for the other fellow when you got into a mix-up — those curls," he said. "Am I all right, Mother? Will I do?"

She took her courage in both hands. Instead of answering, she asked, in what tried to be an unconcerned voice.

"Are you — are you going to call on Maida Crawford this evening?"

"Yep. Made the engagement before I went away."

He did not look at her. His eyes stared straight ahead. Then there was a sudden, sharp movement; he was only squaring his shoulders, but it seemed almost like shaking off his mother's detaining hand.

"Are you going right there, Bill?" she persisted, though inwardly shrinking.

"Nope. I 've got another errand first. That reminds me, Mother; please give me the money I wrote you from Gunter's Springs about. I 'll need it this evening."

"For — for what, Bill?" whispered his mother. "I can't bear to seem to pry and spy on you, dear; but really —"

In sheer terror the little mother broke off and stood

trembling. Bill's face had darkened. There was a look in it which had never before been turned upon her. This was not what he had planned, had hoped.

"I want my money to buy a ring, because I 'm going to ask her to be my wife," he blurted out abruptly. He held his young head very high but he still avoided looking at his mother.

A touch on his hand brought his glance down to see the money proffered, and his mother wiping her eyes softly. Of the things she had thought to say at this time, none now seemed possible to her. She let him go without a word. After he was gone she began hasty, feverish preparations of her own. Her fingers were all thumbs; she could n't find anything; she could n't see her own face in the glass, for blinding tears that stung and hurt as they welled. Yet, somehow, at long last, she managed to get on her out-door wear, and was hurrying toward the little millinery store on the side street before she had fully determined what her errand there was.

She remembered Maida Crawford as a forward, pert little girl, a bold miss, a young woman whose ideas of life she had no sympathy with, yet the time was come that she must find sympathy with this girl, that she must say to her, "I am his mother — you and I must meet each other and find if we cannot love each other. I am his mother."

The shop seemed empty as her quiet foot reached the door; but at the sound of her step there was a movement in the rear. A laughing face looked from behind a Japanese screen that cut off the back portion

of the room and the stairway. Bill was there, Maida recognized his mother. She smelled defeat.

"Bill — won't you go right upstairs and stay until I call you?" she said urgently. "There 's a customer in the shop."

"I 'll wait here," whispered Bill, with a delicious sense of wickedness.

"Go right upstairs — do, please!" urged Maida as she turned perforce and left him.

The millinery business was a failure. Maida knew that Bill was too young for her and that she did not care for the boy, yet the Harveys were a good family, and it was a chance to retrieve herself. She came forward determined not to make a friend of Bill's mother — she would have deemed that impossible — but to fight it out.

"Well?" she said, moving mechanically behind the counter and confronting Ruth across it.

Ruth Harvey studied the girl who faced her. The shallow, youthful prettiness of Maida's countenance was already scored over by mean and peevish lines. To a woman of Ruth's type a vague coarsening of the whole girlish personality was obvious. Also a quick, stupid rage had come to mar her as the elder woman stood making a steady, quiet appraisement, and uttering no word. For it was a stubborn small figure, though Ruth did not mean to be so. It was not to humiliate the girl before her that she was silent. So many thoughts, questions, apprehensions, surged in her mind, that she found no words in which to phrase them, even to make a commonplace demand.

She was desperately afraid of saying the wrong thing, and she said nothing. Maida, certain that she had given Bill time to go upstairs and out of hearing, spoke on a somewhat shriller note.

"What do you want of me, Mrs. Harvey?" she demanded.

"Is — is my boy here?" said Ruth — and then was certain that the inquiry was irritating and silly.

Maida tittered.

"There 's a gentleman calling on me that 's related to you," she said finally. "And it is n't your husband. Plenty of women are just as jealous of their sons, though, as they are of their husbands."

"It is n't a question of jealousy, Maida," said Mrs. Harvey, dismissing the insolence with a quiet authority which enraged her opponent. "I thought I might get here ahead of the boy and have a little talk with you."

"You wanted to get ahead of him," laughed Maida. "Well, you 'll find, if you don't already know, that he 's pretty hard to get ahead of — and so am I. When young folks know their own minds, the old folks can take a back seat, Mrs. Harvey. I 'm not on speaking terms with my own mother, and the reason of it is that I don't believe it 's right for parents to rave around and cut up over what their children choose to do. This is my store. I pay the rent. You can just walk yourself out of it, the same way you walked yourself into it, madam."

This was the kind of thing which had disrupted the Crawford household, and Maida, who rather enjoyed

a tantrum of the sort, was going fluently on when the big screen at the back of the room went over with a slam. A tall, broad-shouldered fellow strode across it, setting his ruthless foot upon its trumpery decorations as he came, and Bill lined up beside his mother. It was like a battleship going into action to aid a distressed tug. His deep tones, guttural with anger, boomed through the room.

"Maida, do you think that 's the way to speak to my mother?"

"Oh, Bill — I did n't know — I thought you 'd gone upstairs."

Scared and trembling, she presented a sorry figure. It came to him queerly that he had never before noticed her with unsmiling lips. How unlovely her mouth was thus. For a moment they stood so, Bill scowling down at her from his man's height, studying the girl whom he had found fascinating but so few moments ago. The illusions concerning this battered, cheapened creature had drifted and drowned in the glistening depths of his mother's tears. All at once something bleak but salutary blew over the boy's heart and quenched the flickering torch of a false Eros.

"Come, Mother," he said gently, "I 'll take you home."

Maida Crawford always was stupid. Instead of letting them go without a word, she made a last attempt.

"She said she came here to get ahead of you," was the taunt. "Well, I guess she 's done it."

At the door Bill turned, looked long and steadily at the girl who followed, dabbing tears from her eyes and volleying words. He held up his hand in an authoritative gesture.

"I heard everything you both said," he told her. "Good-by, Maida. I 'm sorry, too. But, good-by."

When they were out in the street, Bill and his mother, and going home, he strode so fast that the little woman had twice to check and remind him. Then he was all penitence and called himself names.

"I — I forgot you, Mother," he said awkwardly. "I was thinking — about her, and how awful it is that — that —"

He faltered into moody silence, remembering many things, his eyes on the pavement; and thereafter Mrs. Harvey mutely kept pace with his long stride as best she could. But when that haven of the vanquished and heartsick — home — was reached, Bill followed his mother upstairs to her own room, and, as she dropped into her little rocker by the window, flung himself down on his knees beside her and hid his face in her lap.

It had to come. She was glad to be there to soothe the tumult of her boy's pain, which was mingled with a sort of terror. Short, difficult sobs interrupted his speech, such as she had not heard from him since babyhood.

"The awful thing about it is to think that they 're all like that — that she may have always been the same — she was, Mother, she was, I know it now!" he said, raising a tear-disfigured face. "They look

so beautiful — such ladies — and they make you feel as if the world was — they make you feel as if you would just do anything for them — and then they turn out to be like that — that! Oh, Mother, how could you have gone there? She made you — cry!"

And she realized that in all the years he had never seen tears in her eyes until that night. But she put aside the subject of herself.

"Oh, no — not all of them, Billy — not many of them," she whispered, laying her cheek against his, smoothing down the rumpled hair. "There are plenty of good women in the world — only they don't advertise themselves, nor run after you, as this one did. A love will come to you and it will bring happiness —"

Bill flinched and crimsoned at the word as though she had mentioned sacred mysteries.

"It does — it ought to — ought n't it, Mother?" he faltered huskily. "There 's father and you — I 'm sure you 're everything to each other — but then I can't have anybody that 's perfect like you are."

It made her feel like praying — or weeping. Instead she laughed a little very tenderly and softly, patting his head, whispering to him.

"There 'll come a time, dear, when you 'll find her — the real woman God intended for you," the little woman went gallantly on. "She 'll be your standard of perfection, then, Bill, and God send that I 've brought up my boy to win such a woman and be worthy of her."

XV

HIS UMBRELLA

THIS first touch of the torch sent Bill back into his old gruff, boyish self — a burned child who dreaded the fire. Yet the thing had been educative. He hung about his mother a good deal and talked to her — not of the matter itself; but he asked sometimes, wistfully, what certain specially feminine belongings were for, and showed an awkward gentleness in trying to understand and adjust them. He was groping in blind boy-fashion toward the light. She prayed that it might be a true dawn indeed.

William was to be married sooner than had been planned; on the completion of his medical studies his grandfather proposed to arrange matters so that the young couple might set up housekeeping and the young doctor set up in practice at the same time. In those days of Maida's ascendancy, which Bill now wondered at, as at the doings of somebody else, he had speculated as to whether it would n't be a fine thing, if Maida agreed, for William and himself to make a double wedding of it. Surely the two Mrs. William Harveys would have to be good friends. He looked back at it, and he found no reason for this contention,

any more than he found a reason for the entire infatuation. Maida Crawford's millinery shop was empty, the girl had married again, Steiner's bar-tender this time. She was gone from Watauga, and her name was never mentioned in her home. Bill was sorry for her father. Then, one day, he noticed that the store was open, and the dwelling above it being put in order. He saw an old woman, fierce-looking, high-nosed, and with a glittering eye, directing some workmen on the side porch. He thought there was something familiar about her, and later learned that Mother Missouri Starr had taken the place and was going to open a shop for the sale of antiques, a sort of commercialism which seems to appeal to many broken-down gentlewomen of the South.

Bill had to pass the place quite frequently, but he observed that Mother Missouri had put off her accessibility with her strange creed and strange garments. She stared at him unknowingly, and refused to acknowledge his greeting except by the barest little nod. He told his mother about it.

"Some people are just that way," Ruth agreed. "When one thing proves false they decide that there 's no truth left in the world."

She glanced up suddenly and surprised an odd expression on her boy's face. It stayed with her all morning. She hoped his experience with Maida would not make him cynical.

It was late that night that Bill, coming home from the office through a heavy rainstorm, passed the little shop and found it drenched and dark, but not quite

silent. His father had promised him the business manager's position on the *Herald* as a birthday gift when he was twenty-one, the arrangement to be dependent on his making good in the position he now held. Bill was attacking the proposition as he used to attack a ball-game. He had worked late to-night, because old Tarver, the clumsy, out-going bookkeeper and business manager, had made an error that kept them chasing a wretched small sum up and down the pages before they could balance the books. All the trolls of the water-witch were loose that night. Bill did not put it in that fanciful fashion, though he was dimly aware that William might have done so.

" 'S wet rain all right," he muttered as he pulled his hat lower and turned with relief into the small cross street that led to the avenue where his home stood.

This it was that led past the millinery store. He stared at the blank front windows, behind which Miss Starr had now arranged some old mahogany, and a few pieces of antique silver. It seemed like a dream to remember the flowery creations Maida had put in those windows, and his own belief that here was the woman of his heart. As the thoughts crossed his mind, he fancied he heard a faint cry. He could not be sure, but it was enough to stop him and make him tilt the umbrella so that it flared toward the side porch like a monster ear. He stood a moment, with the rain beating a tattoo on the stretched breadths; but, no, the front of the house was still dark, played upon by the shine from the corner arc-light. Then as he decided that he had been mistaken, and made ready to move

on, the sound came again. It was a child's voice — a girl child's.

"Please — oh, please, Grandmother!"

Before he knew what he was doing Bill had jerked open the rotting old gate of the side yard, intending to make for the porch.

"Grandmother! Grandmother!" the distressful cry was at hand now, right in front of him on that porch there. "I got back as quick as I could, Grandmother. Your time 's wrong. I was here before ten o'clock. Let me in. Please do!"

Bill halted in the gateway uncertain what to do. There was more light on this side of the house and he made out quite plainly a girl in a shabby old raincoat standing beneath the insufficient shelter of that small side porch and pounding on a closed door. She did not hear or see him. As he looked, she stepped back and out into the rain to stare up at the closed windows of the second floor and call again. She was dripping like a naiad — he could see that — her garments twisted around her slim figure in the spiteful gusts and made her look very little and childish, her dark hair was loosened about her face in a blowing cloud, and all gemmed with rain.

"Grandmother," she called despairingly up to those black irresponsive windows above her. "I 'm so frightened — and so ashamed. Please! Somebody might come." Then she caught sight of Bill's tall figure in the gateway and added despairingly, "There is somebody coming now — oh, do let me in!"

The young fellow hung back a little at that, seeing

what pain his presence gave and never believing for a moment that such an appeal as this would go unanswered. He had guessed at once that the child was Lynette Starr, and the glimpse he had of a little white face and big dark eyes stirred some curiously sweet recollection.

As he stood, the wind dropped; the slanting sheets of rain changed to a descending shower, steady, persistent. Bill closed the gate behind him with a decided snap, covered the weed-grown path in three long strides, and held his umbrella over the girl.

"You ought n't to stand right square under the drip, if you are locked out," he said bruskly. "I 've been locked out myself sometimes, but I always hunted up the driest place I could find, if it was raining."

She turned with a little cry; then he could divine in the dimness under the big umbrella that she smiled up at him.

"It was foolish, was n't it?" she agreed. "But I 've been here nearly an hour now. I don't know that I could get any wetter." She laughed a little nervously. The voice was that same instrument that had wailed a moment since in fear and distress, but another player blew upon the tender reed now; it cooed and warbled; its laughter was a little brook, startled and incredulous over a stone, yet timorously delighted with the bold thing. "I think my grandmother — must —" She looked eagerly at him as they stepped together toward the small porch, and broke off to say, "I know you now — I was so dreadfully frightened when I first saw you."

It seemed to Bill that her instant identification of him was a marvel with a world meaning.

"Yes, it 's just Bill Harvey," he said nonchalantly, but in his ears the name now sounded more a boast than when he had heard it yelled from the grandstand by a hundred throats.

"You — you live near here, don't you?" asked the girl timidly. He recognized that outreach toward humanity which he had seen in her from the first, knew it dimly as he was trying to identify what he saw before him with the little shadowy girl of memory, the heroine who had gone upstairs to warn the children in the burning school-building — and had done it so quietly that she had reaped no fame, the queerly-garbed little schismatic who felt the devil in her. It was strange to see her just a — he recoiled before the idea that she was just a girl, kin to Maida Crawford with her fraudulent curls. The wind and rain tossed aside something which he muttered, but somehow she guessed at it and answered,

"Grandmother 's come back here to live, and we 've very little money. She gets the things in the shop from friends of hers — people who used to be very rich — and she 's selling them on commission. There 's nobody left but grandmother and me."

Without ceremony he pulled her toward the end of the porch, where it was lighter, and stared down at her. The young thing's beauty was of that extraordinary, fragile order which suggests the illustrations of a book of fairy-tales, rather than an every-day girl walking the streets of an every-day town. Her eyes

were big, dark, luminous, jetty-fringed; surely they had come straight out of "The Arabian Nights," and they looked twice-marvelous, set in her little wild-rose face. Her tremulous mouth was fresh as a blossom — Bill's heart gave a sudden choking jolt under his tight-buttoned coat and vest when he looked at it — like the old John horse that he used to drive to Schneider's delivery wagon, trying to buck in harness, he told himself. The dusky mass of hair which had loosed itself from the one great plait, showed odd gleams in its mesh that evidenced how recently it had borne the brightness of childhood. She had tiny hands and feet — ridiculous small members, fit only for a doll or a fairy — poor, hard-working, hard-living little girl, set to attack her sordid tasks with such an equipment! It was like trying to dig post-holes with a cambric needle, or break stones with a bunch of roses.

"You remember grandmother?" the girl whispered fearfully, pushing close to Bill's shoulder, looking up into his face, her terror that some one within was listening, plainly overcoming her shyness. "She 's made a rule that if I 'm out after ten o'clock she 'll lock the door against me. She sent me on an errand clear to the other side of town — out where we used to live — but I was back before ten — I know her clock 's wrong. I 've been pounding and calling ever since. I don't know what to do."

He felt a tender proprietorship in the little, locked-out girl, such as children feel when in the deep woods they come upon a fledgling fallen from the nest, and

try in clumsy, human fashion to befriend it. Suddenly certain moments of his past life linked themselves — that day when the baby girl had given him a little pink shell, the time this beautiful dark head had rested on his shoulder while the little girl slept on that far-away Sunday morning when the children stoned Mother Missouri. The chain linked rapidly in those school days when the little girl with the bird's name had saved him from open disgrace in the spelling match, when she had gone, steady-footed and unafraid, up to warn the First-Graders while he drummed them out of the burning schoolhouse — little children whom Maida Crawford's crude fear would have destroyed. Ah, he felt again the surge of the boy's ambition, running between a red-hot sky and a red-hot earth, with a soft, unaccustomed voice calling in his ears to tell him that he could reach the goal — and in that moment he knew that to Lynette, he was William. There was such a rush of information that it was confusing.

Before he quite knew what he intended to say or do, he found his hand on the rain-sodden shoulder. He was a bit startled and perturbed at his desire to call her sweet names and pet her, but the boy was not self-analytical.

"You come right home with me," he said authoritatively. "My mother 'll take care of you. If I 've doped out your grandmother right, she 'll be sorry enough in the morning. You come with me."

"Oh — I could n't!" Lynette shrank back and tears sprang suddenly into the big dark eyes. "Some-

how I don't mind you a bit — I guess it 's because we were children together. But I could n't bear to have your folks see me like this, and know I 'd been locked out."

She turned and thumped a few ineffectual thumps upon the closed door with an inadequate small fist.

Bill looked on, smiling indulgently. They had been children together! What did she call herself now? he wondered. What was that? She was sobbing! Instantly he reached forward and caught the little beating fist — the storm-tossed sparrow! — in his own warm hands.

"Don't cry," he begged. "It breaks me all up to see — anybody cry. How cold your little paws are! You 'll just die if you stay here in this soaking rain. You 've got to let me take care of you."

The umbrella had dropped unheeded and the wind crowded it back into a corner. She raised her tearful face to him and something exquisite came to him in the shining of those wet eyes; something mighty and sweet, something awful in its tenderness, laid hold upon the boy's heart and shook it. There seemed a sacred enclosure about the two, right there on the rotting, water-swept old porch, the black night and the wild storm all about them. They looked into each other's faces, terribly moved and fascinated, yet both fearful. Then Lynette pulled a hand away to wipe her eyes.

"You 're awfully good. I don't mind it so much now you 're here, but I must n't keep you so long —

late at night this way. What would you do, if you 'd been locked out?"

Thought of this big, competent young fellow being locked out from anywhere seemed so comical that a faint little smile wavered over her face. Bill hailed it with delight.

"I 'd break open a window and climb in. Would your grandmother — are you afraid of her, if you can get in?"

"Oh, no, no — it is n't so bad as that," Cinderella hastened to reassure him. "She 's only doing it for my good — you know how they talk. But we can't get in below stairs, on account of the storm shutters — you see she 's fastened them all; and I don't see how we could reach the upstairs windows."

"Dead easy," pronounced Bill. The rain had lulled; there was a faint glimmer of moonlight behind the blowing clouds. He stepped out into the yard. The little shop was on a step hillside and a building in course of erection above it pushed a big side porch close to its second-story window. It was a simple matter to negotiate an entrance. Bill, brought up roundly against the sudden, commonplace ending of the adventure, perceived the beauty and the necessity of delay. When was he going to see Lynette again, and how? For he understood the lady who had been Mother Missouri too well to hope for admittance as an ordinary — or extraordinary — caller.

"I did n't know where you went when your grandmother took you away from Watauga," he began, re-

turning to the porch, addressing the great dark eyes and the little strained face awaiting him.

"Back to Virginia. Grandmother has a great many friends there, and connections. I saw your cousin. When I first heard his name I hoped it was going to be you — but it was only him. Could n't you find any way to get me in?"

"Sure!" in a confident tone yet with a curious reluctance. "What window's that right above this door?"

"My room," said Lynette anxiously, almost hopefully. "If we could only get that open! But how could I climb to it?"

Bill made easy work of scrambling from the new house's veranda to the roof of the old shop's porch. He opened his knife, slipped the catch by means of the blade, and pushed up the window she had designated. Then he looked down at the little figure that lifted to him a trustful, eager face and luminous eyes, out of a wonderful halo that the yellow corner lamp made upon the floating mist of rain.

"Come over here and I'll boost you up," he invited. There was a short ladder, but he studiously eliminated that from the problem. He leaped down beside her, laughing at her tremors, and delay. "I'll lift you right up there," he declared, making ready to suit the action to the word. "I can hold an umbrella, too. You won't get wet."

"Oh, no, you — you can't," the girl faltered, crimsoning. "You don't know how heavy I am." She

ran to the edge of the porch, fumbled hastily there, and came back in triumph with a box. "I can step on this," she suggested, "and then I can get right up."

"Better let me try it and see if it 'll bear your weight," Bill put in with his most practical, old-man air. He leaped upon the defenseless box, and, with a weak crackle of despair the flimsy affair obligingly gave way. There seemed to be nothing for it but Bill's arms for the ascent. Lynette glowed with adorable confusion.

"We 'll just about fool around here till we 'll wake the whole neighborhood," the boy argued, not without reason. "Aw, come on, what 's the use?"

"You 're not really going to lift me?" protested the girl, drawing back, yet somehow seeming to lean toward him, too.

"I 'm is," Bill uttered the bit of slang with a heart that astonished him by its rapid beating. To put an end to this absurd agitation over a very plain and simple matter, he picked Lynette up lightly and swung her aloft to the porch.

What was it the lifting of that weight did to him? What was the subtle change that came to her, being so lifted? Again that drowning tide of tenderness, that mighty impulse toward possession, throbbed in his heart, ran through his veins, and tightened the arms about her. The girl seemed to share his emotion, quite as though they had been one. Both were a bit frightened by the heady, irresponsible intensity of the feeling, yet strangely elated. Humanity

measures life by time, not by experiences; at the latter gage, these two had lived through years of tenderness and intimacy when they finally stood together on the unfinished porch of the new house and crept toward the roof which was to carry Linnie to her open window.

She let him help her across the space between the two porches and support her that she should not fall from the wet, slanting shingles. She knew now that she was to make use of his strength — that, in so far, he belonged to her, she to him.

"You 've always been so good to me," she whispered, when she turned inside the window to thank him, as he hung a moment beyond the sill, waiting for good-night. "You were the one boy that was kind to me when we were children."

"I always will be, Linnie, I always will be — kind to you," he promised with what seemed quite unnecessary fervor. He wanted to say more — he knew just what he wanted to express, but he could n't make the necessary sounds.

"I 'm glad it was you. I could n't have borne to be found this way by any one else," she whispered. "I don't mind you a bit, somehow."

The words seemed like poetry to him. He wondered if they did n't rhyme somewhere. He strove to reply in kind. What he said was:

"It was a beastly shame — locking you out. I call it about the limit."

"Hush," cautioned the girl. "We must n't speak so loud now."

Presumably for this reason Bill cautiously drew a little closer.

Lynette knelt inside the window; he sat almost on the sill; his umbrella sheltered them both; they whispered lest Mother Missouri hear. There was a good deal to tell. Bill was not inclined to relate his own adventures, but he could ask questions; and he soon had the brief annals of her days since his last sight of her running away up the sunny street of fever-stricken Watauga with a big doll in her arms. There had been an attempt to take the girl from Miss Starr. A little legacy had been left her.

"You ought to have gone," Bill decided.

"But grandmother cried so," Lynette whispered. "She does n't mean to be unkind. She let me go to school when I would n't leave her. She thinks it 's right to save my money, so I 'll have something after a while. What is hardest to bear is that it cuts me off from all the young folks. I have n't a friend in the world — unless you — and one other."

One other! Bill almost fell off of the roof. Surely two friends was a modest number, yet he had a sense of insufferable crowding, a sudden raging desire to annihilate that other. The world came to an end right here. He dropped his umbrella back and let the rain have him. Also a gust that spattered in Linnie's face made her laugh. She got to her feet, soundlessly, drew back into the inner shadows and returned, holding something out to him. When the light struck it he saw it was a doll — a big, flashy, store-dressed, stiff-bodied, yellow-curled doll!

"Don't you remember?" she asked in a soft, choking voice that sounded as though she were laughing and wanted to cry.

Some way the waxen features accused him of untold emotions — made his heart contract and sent the blood pounding down to his finger-ends. He nodded and looked away from the girl and her doll. He wished he could find as many as six words that would be fit to say to her. She counted that waxen thing one friend — and her eyes were asking him whether he would be the other.

"Oh, you 've got me," he said at last huskily. "From this day and date you may rely on that. I 've had a few troubles of my own. I 'll tell you about 'em sometime. They 've made me pretty sore on — on girls. But that does n't mean you. There goes my umbrella," as something rattled along the roof to the ground. "It 's started home — got more sense than I have. I reckon I must say good-night. You 're sure you 're all right now?"

He made no mention of his own precarious hold upon the roof. Their faces were close together — that must be so if they were to whisper low enough to escape sharp listening ears. The drip-drip of their drenched garments remind them faintly of golden water that flowed by some great white throne; the boom of a broken gutter that poured noisily from the roof had the resonance of celestial organ tones. So do cases alter circumstances.

"Good-night," Bill whispered.

"Good-night," replied the girl inside the window,

making the old doll bob at him in a stiff courtesy.

Bill found his mother seated at the old-fashioned piano playing softly while she waited for him. For once he forebore to reprove her that she had sat up. In haste he poured out the story of Mother Missouri Starr, her granddaughter, and the locking out.

"She 's nutty — that 's what," he concluded. "You understand what I mean, Mother. Her belfry 's plumb full of bats."

He leaned against the door casing. Mrs. Harvey, poised a lifted hand interrogatively.

"Maybe we could have the little girl taken away from her," Bill's side-partner said. "I 've always been sorry for Miss Starr —" With her right hand she strummed a faint, haunting melody. "You know, dear, I 'm of Quaker stock and I go to the Unitarian church still though your father is the eldest son of the Rector of St. Jude's. There are questions of conscience. Other people's consciences often seem queer to us. But the child must be considered. I 'm a member of the society for the prevention of cruelty to children. I rather think I could get some kind person to adopt the little girl if her great-aunt is mentally unfit —"

She was studying the keys thoughtfully, when a queer sound from Bill caused her to look up. His face was red, his eyes dancing. At her glance he burst into a boy's hearty, noisy laughter.

"It sounded so funny," he half apologized when he could get his breath. "Linnie 's sixteen or seventeen — a regular kill-'em-at-the-first-glance beauty.

Somebody 's left her a little money and she 'll get it when she 's of age."

The mother faced around on her stool and regarded her son with spirit.

"You surely gave me to understand that she was a child — a little thing afraid to be out in the dark, who played with dolls," she urged. "A baby that you lifted and carried up to a second story window."

The quick blood flowed into that brown face of Bill's.

"I carried her up to the window all right," he said pretty steadily, "and — she is a little thing — just about comes to here on me." He drew a line across a heart which thumped at the collocation of ideas. "That story about the doll, though — that was just a joke. I sto — borrowed it from Winsdale's store along the time Al died. 'Member? I got it same time I got the things to bury him in. And she 's kept it all these years — said it was her only friend till — till — said it was her only friend."

Ruth Harvey had heard most of the details of that story and it touched her keenly.

"Poor child," she said softly, "and with the Starr beauty — you said she was beautiful, did n't you, Billy? I remember what a lovely little thing she used to be. Oh, of course, she must be fifteen. How time flies. Your Aunt Amelia wanted to adopt her; but of course Mother Missouri would n't hear to it."

"I wish you 'd adopt her now. You always said you wanted a daughter." For all his hardihood, Bill was unable to meet the maternal eye. But presently

he went on in a fair semblance of his every-day tone. "I 'm going to hang round down there nights from this on, anyhow. There 's no telling when that old party locks her out again. Linnie said that I did n't dare to call. I knew that already. It used to be as much as your life was worth to speak to the child when I played with Al; but I 've got to keep an eye on her somehow."

"You ought to get to bed as early as you can, Bill, with all this extra work your father 's talking about," suggested Mrs. Harvey cautiously.

"Aw, it 's a shame folks sleep so much!" vowed youth in its glory. "A blooming waste of time I call it. I can keep up my work at the office and manage to have an eye on Linnie, too, I guess."

The mother looked after his broad shoulders as he ran lightly up the stairs to his room.

XVI

HIS TRUE LOVE

THE ensuing weeks saw young Harvey, prospective business manager of the *Herald,* a frequent visitor at the little antique shop. Most of the things were too expensive for his purse besides being such as did not in any way appeal to him. If Miss Starr recognized him as the boy who had dressed her dead nephew for the grave, such recognition apparently meant nothing to the wrong-headed old woman but a desire never to see his face again, since the associations were painfully humiliating. He tried soliciting an advertisement from her, and found himself more unpopular in the guise of a solicitor than he had been as a possible customer. But one golden day the older woman had a headache — blessed malady — and remained upstairs. Linnie, behind the counter, glanced at him with big eyes in which terror and delight strove together. He had a mad prompting to ask her whether they kept wedding rings.

The two young creatures were deep in swift, whispered conversation when Miss Missouri poked a withered old face in at the door and called.

"Yes, Grandmother, in a minute," answered the girl in a soft little scared voice. "I 'm waiting on a customer."

"Waiting on a customer," echoed Miss Missouri's thin, suspicious tones. Getting no further answer, she thrust her head a bit further into the room. She was evidently in bedroom gear only, for she still held back from entering. "What does he want?" she demanded.

Lynette cast an imploring look at Bill. The boy knew very well what he wanted. He was unprepared to tell Miss Missouri Starr at that exact minute — though a wild notion of the sort flashed through his mind.

"*What — does — he want?*" came in sharp staccato from behind the door edge. "If he can't tell, and you can't tell, he may as well move on. I won't have any idle young men hanging around. Lynette — do you hear? Tell that young man to go."

Again Lynette looked into the warm eyes that sought hers, but now her own were swimming in tears, and her face was burning crimson.

"Oh, go quick, before she says something horrid to you," whispered the girl. "I know you — you must despise me for this; but I can't bear to have you insulted here. Go quick."

Reluctantly Bill was moved to withdraw. He never glanced toward that back door. The feeling was strong upon him that he ought to stay and see the little girl through; but he could not withstand the pleading of her voice, her eyes.

"All right, but I 'm going to look after you," he muttered as he went out.

Again and again in the weeks that followed, the little shabby figure with the wild-rose face and the Arabian Nights' eyes, leaving the old shop, ran against a surprised young man who had to walk beside her and talk a while, just to explain his astonishment at the encounter and his entire innocence of any intention to bring it about. And love ripened swiftly between these two, if that can be said to ripen which is born already at its fullest sweetness and beauty.

Bill told his mother all about it; he had finally to tell his father, since the new chase took so much time from office work, and took it in such irregular fashion that the boy was in danger of lying under the stigma of negligence. Now indeed he must make good for that promised business managership; and yet Lynette must not be left alone and uncomforted. He used to meet her out on errands, and get her to turn aside with him into a tiny bit of a burial-lot which hung, half ashamed, at the side of the old Moravian church out on Willow Street. They would wander up and down between the sagging headstones and the sunken, forgotten graves, since the winter weather was bright and sunny, but too sharp for sitting. There in that still, lethean corner, they would discuss all youth's shy plans for a vague and blissful future — life and love fluttering their delicate, roseate wings, triumphing and going on above death and decay.

"Do you — do you suppose we ought to give this up?" Linnie asked him one day, as they sat for a

moment perched on the old wall at the gate of the grave-yard, ready to say good-by.

"I don't want to give it up unless we can do better," said practical Bill in that tone which was meat and drink to his timid little love. "Mother keeps a line on us; she knows just what we're doing. I'll ask her to call on Miss Missouri."

"Oh, no, she must n't do that!" Linnie grasped his arm in her excitement and then let go. Vitally engrossed in the pretty, hesitant movement, he obligingly advanced the arm, but nothing further came of it. "Grandmother might treat her horribly. I know she used to think your mother was lovely — I've heard her say no one in Watauga had a broader, nobler nature, a truer heart — but she's so different now. She never got over the way her flock behaved in yellow fever times. I believe she sort of hates any one that knows of it. That's the only reason I can think of for her not liking you."

Bill liked that. The flattery was innocent and sweet — and it was unconscious.

"You and mother'll love each other, all right," he said softly.

"Oh — *of course* — I'd adore her," Linnie agreed; "but if she came to the shop and grandmother was horrid, she might not like me; she might not think I was nice enough to be your friend. I don't know what I'd do if your mother thought ill of me."

Soft reverence sounded in the tone that said "your mother."

"Well, this sort of thing's all right for me," Bill

told her, "but I can't let it go on, on your account. You've got to have your chance in the world, and a good time like other girls, and have things."

The ridiculously small hand traveled down over a shiny, greenish-black knee, and sought to lengthen a shabby skirt above a torn shoe. Bill felt his eyes swim.

"When I'm twenty-one — or maybe when I'm eighteen, I'm not sure about that — I'll have quite a little bit of money," the poor child said with pathetic dignity. "Even grandmother can't keep it from me, then."

"How old are you now?" Bill asked softly.

"Seventeen. Do girls come of age when they're eighteen in this State? Several people have told me so, but nobody knows for certain, except lawyers, and they'd charge ten dollars to tell you — wouldn't they?"

"You'd be of age to-morrow, if you were married."

Bill had meant to speak quite naturally and in a careless tone; but the words seemed to shout themselves, baldly, shamelessly, though he had barely whispered them with his lips close to the little ear about which the dusky curls hung.

Suddenly that little ear, the cheek beside it, the throat and brow, were all dyed with a heavenly red. Linnie would fain have turned her head to look at him. For one dizzy moment, while something more thrilling than fear ran through her nerves, she debated the propriety of saying lightly, "Is that so?" She

even thought it would be well to laugh a little, and make a joke about its being an inducement to matrimony. But neither laughter nor jest came to her lips. Instead, she sat very still, staring straight down at the old stone wall and picking nervously at a bit of mortar. Bill, with a buoyant sense of mastery on him, now that the words were said, yet found himself unable to move hand or foot, to utter a syllable of that which surged inchoate in his heart, or even to manage some commonplace sentence to cover his inability to speak as he would.

It seemed to the two that they sat thus a long time. Dear children, they scarcely dared entertain this wonderful guest that had settled down in their hearts, preening its bright feathers, looking about with glowing eyes, softly stretching strong — oh, strong — wings, whose touch set both hearts thrilling and vibrating almost to pain, and made them strangely light. Finally Linnie spoke, hesitatingly:

"I 'll be seventeen years old to-morrow," she said.

And then the irrepressible boy in Bill came to the rescue. He clapped his hands, he snatched off his hat and threw it up. He nearly upset them both from the wall in his sudden enthusiasm.

"Seventeen to-morrow!" he ejaculated. "Well, you 're going to have a birthday — a real, sure-enough birthday. We 'll celebrate it right. Oh, Linnie, Ben Hur 's to be here at Cobb's theater to-morrow night. Can't I take you? That house next door to the shop is vacant yet, I could get you out just as easy. Do come!"

"Oh, I could n't — I have n't anything at all fit to wear," protested the girl, ready to cry. "You 'd be ashamed of me."

Bill leaned forward and picked up the little hand in both his big warm ones. "Likely case," he said incredulously, and his eyes looked deep into hers so that she crimsoned again. "If you have n't got anything that you want to wear, would you let me bring you whatever you need? Do, Linnie — be a good child."

Shyly the long-fringed eyes drooped, but the girl, too, was adrift on wonderful seas of speculation that washed unnecessary conventional debris from her mind.

"You say your mother knows all about our — our seeing each other so much," she began timidly. "And you 'd tell her every bit about this, would n't you?"

"I sure would," agreed Bill stoutly, suppressing, in his wisdom, the information that he would tell his mother afterward, when any objection she might have would be ineffectual, rather than before the event. "Why, Linnie, I think it 's a sin not to act tickled because a fellow 's born; it 's a — er — a sort of anarchy. And not to celebrate *your* birthday would be blasphemous. What are you going to let me bring you to wear?"

The girl smiled slowly, and in her eyes the dream grew.

"The people we got that mahogany sideboard from sent me a pink muslin last summer," she said softly. "They 're distant kin; but grandmother never would

let me wear it, because it —" She paused. That fluting voice of hers dropped almost to a whisper. "It 's cut low in the neck."

The boy made that ecstatic little cluck of the tongue which the young mother gives when her baby takes its first step.

"Say that over again, and say it slow — it sounds good to me!" he murmured, wagging his head from side to side in the movement we use when our comfort is too great to be contained in the measure of mere words. "Why, it must be a regular foxy evening gown — it must be that! Linnie, I 'm tickled to polka-dots. With a frock like that, you 'd never refuse to go!"

She would not — she could not — she did not; and the stars in their courses worked for her, as indeed they always do for true lovers. When the morning and the evening had brought the next night, she found herself alone in the house, her grandmother having been called to what was advertised as the last bed-side — and that a repentant one — of the almost forgotten Mrs. Sivley of the withered arm.

The girl laid out her pink muslin on the bed, and dressed slowly, reverently. It was hours too early, yet; the bliss of that toilet must be lingered out. Thought of appearing abroad with no hat on, of wearing in her hair only the half-wreath of ribbon roses which had come with the muslin gown, brought a sort of delicious terror, and the putting of those softly-glimmering, frankly make-believe buds in place required many re-doings of the dark curls. It was after seven

o'clock when she heard a tapping on her window pane, and, looking forth, espied a shapeless bundle bobbing at the end of a fishing pole. She threw up the sash and, with a sudden, grotesquely civil bowing forward of the limber bamboo, the bundle dropped on the floor, while Bill's voice from somewhere remarked stealthily, "Eight o'clock sharp."

She leaned from the casement, but could see nothing. He had evidently made use of the friendly new house. So after calling, "Thank you — oh, thank you — I'll be ready!" she pulled the window hastily down, opened her package, and spread its contents on the small stand before which she had been dressing. Wrapping everything else was a great white silken shawl of Oriental fabric, which the girl instantly guessed — and loved it for that — belonged to Bill's mother; inside was a box of long-stemmed pink roses, and a pair of white silk gloves. Bill had tried for white kid with many buttons, hoping to be entrusted with the manipulation of these latter; but the saleswoman with whom he dealt was entirely sane and not unkindly.

"What number?" she inquired, as Bill, his eyes glowing, touched the dainty things with loving finger.

"Oh, just a pair, you know," he began.

"And what number — what size, you understand?" the woman behind the counter repeated, smiling at him a little.

"Size? Oh, small — little bits of things," cried Bill in arrogant pride. "The smallest hands you ever

saw for a nearly grown young lady — she 's seventeen to-day, but she 's sure got child's size hands."

Gently but firmly the saleswoman maintained that kid gloves must be sold by number, in order to have any assurance of a fit. With some reluctance Bill was persuaded to accept the more elastic silk. And now Lynette stood at her small mirror and tried on the gifts of love. The Arabian Nights' eyes looked back at her out of the wild-rose face, with admiration, with a wonder almost incredulous. Clad in the delicate pink muslin with its pale froth of embroidery, the little wreath in her dark hair, and the falling softness of the white wrap with its Eastern suggestion, she was truly of luminous, of fairly dazzling loveliness.

When eight o'clock came she pushed up the window, and, gathering the silken folds of her shawl about her white throat, peered out into the dusk with a wide, excited gaze.

Bill did not take chances on the clicking of the gate-latch — he stepped over.

"Where 's the fiery dragon?" he inquired in a genial whisper from below, then catching a fairy glimpse of the peri in the window above, by the light of the corner lamp, "Oh — you 're sure a peach! You 're the loveliest thing I ever —"

"The best luck in the world!" broke in Linnie, rosy with embarrassment at his words, and his look and tone. "Mrs. Sivley 's going to die and she sent for grandmother at last." (Tender-hearted Linnie was quite unconscious of any cruelty in her exultation.) "But she 's locked all the doors and the down-

stairs windows, and taken the keys. I think maybe I can open one of these windows from inside — if you can wait."

"Aw, don't bother — there 's not time, anyway. I 'm coming up there for you," he told her as he sprang to the floor of the adjoining porch.

When he had brought her safely to that position, love's ladder, the old, old ladder of the lifted arms — and never was Jacob's thronged by fairer visions — conveyed her little feet at last to earth, the sheer pink gown raised above tiny slippers that matched its tint, the white shawl shrouding neck and shoulders as white.

She was shy with him, this big, handsome Bill in his evening clothes and long light overcoat, whose ardent eyes followed her every movement so persistently.

"It — I feel strange," she murmured, doubtfully. "Do I look all right? Will I do?"

They were emerging into the modified light of the side street. Bill swept the little figure with one comprehensive glance. He had a mad impulse to pick her up and carry her — those tiny pink slippers were not fit for walking over the snow.

"All right!" he echoed. "You 'll have every other girl in the theater faded to a shadow. There 's only a few steps to go. I 've got a carriage around the corner. I thought it would n't do to come closer than that."

Is there in all youth's calendar a moment more proud and beatific than that in which boyhood *en escort* "takes a carriage"? Again Linnie was overwhelmed with wondering admiration of the young man who

stood, tall and handsome, hat in hand, holding open the door of the vehicle for her. Again Bill was utterly carried away and subjugated by the adorable radiant-eyed vision that swept its girlish fineries daintily into the dark interior. She sank down on the cushions; she could not resist one small bounce, and a soft clapping of the hands, as she murmured, "Is n't it grand — oh, is n't it lovely!"

"Aw, a body soon gets used to it," deprecated the prince, as he seated himself rather stiffly beside her — not too close — and they drove away. A new sense of responsibility hampered his spontaneity, and he somehow could not turn and look at her.

This chariot of glory rolling over cloud ridges — was it only Poly Bony's cab with that gentleman of color on the box?

"The gloves fit me just exactly," Linnie ventured, dimpling a bit, glancing down at the hands in her lap.

"I 'm glad." He looked sidewise at them — he had small interest in accommodatingly elastic gloves that needed no help with the buttoning. But those eloquent eyes of his — that so out-talked his boy's tongue — once safely upon her, clung there.

"This is what you ought to have all the time," he said. "Linnie — you 're great. I never saw you look just right, and — and at home — before."

She received this with a girlish dignity unexpected and appealing, though the heart under pink muslin and white silken shawl fluttered and shook its wings.

So the streets and squares were passed. Presently

with a grand air, and a box of candy in his pocket, Bill was assisting her to alight at the theater. And it was not the boy's partial vision alone that found her beautiful. Without seeming to notice, he saw how others stared at her. All sorts of people turned their heads to look. He was half delighted, half jealous of their glances and their smiles; but she was quite unconscious of both. About the figure beside Bill Harvey, with its little dark head and its great lustrous eyes, hovered evocations of faery, a light, a perfume, a meaning far-brought. She seemed a creature as exquisitely, as touchingly apart and wonderful, as though she had been indeed the little mermaiden, the old sea-king's child, given, for love's sake, her one night as a mortal among her lover's folk.

William was going in beside his Bessie. There was n't time for explanations; but Bill appreciated the look his love got from both of them.

Lynette drank her draught of joy sedately. Only her glowing eyes and the pulsing of her bare girlish throat, showed what intensity of delight surged within her.

Those first nights in big, lighted spaces, color and movement and human contact offering themselves as a cup of intoxication, and music stirring the heart to almost unbearable emotion! The little village girl, palpitant, enchanted, seated beside her one friend, in a box — a box! Oh, *that* for a monarch on a golden throne!

The boy sat in happy silence. He had a peculiar sense of being part of the play. Perhaps he was part

of that play which angels smile to gaze upon. There is something sacred in perfect happiness, the credulous, utter bliss of youth that coins its own gold from the brown ore of life. Between the acts he murmured bits of grave criticisms and comment. The girl blushed when he mentioned that he had read the book "Ben Hur" and thought it great; she blushed when he remarked that he had seen this actor's portrait in a New York paper, and read a jolly good account of the manner in which the play was staged; though why she should have done so, let that heartless man who can analyze the coloring of a flower or the bloom upon a grape explain. The time passed, a lovely, animated vision of tempered lights, beautiful movement, harmonious sounds, and fine emotion.

At last they were walking on clouds down the aisle, among the smiling, well-dressed people, and everybody was looking with eyes of love at Lynette.

Was that Ted Winsdale approaching with so determined an air? Did he think to have an introduction to Linnie? What besotted presumption! Ted was a good chap — just among the boys. And he could put a curve on to a baseball that — but a candidate for Linnie's acquaintance? Well, Bill guessed not!

He was glad to shut her in the carriage where he had her all to himself. She gathered the big white wrap about her and shivered, in sheer nervous rapture. Eagerly misunderstanding, Bill snatched off his overcoat and swallowed up the pink and white in its cozy folds. The stiff sleeves rebelled, and his arm re-

mained about her shoulders — to hold the coat. Bending her head shyly, her cheek brushed his hand.

"Oh — I — I beg pardon," she sighed, moving from the clinging hand and inadvertently sinking against a broadcloth shoulder. Instantly the arm around her tightened.

"You — you 're not mad at me?" whispered Bill in time-honored formula. (How many dear, dead women have been wooed with that sacred emblem-sentence?)

She sat very still, lest he imagine that she shrank from him in unkindness.

"No — oh, no," she whispered.

Then no more was said. He was intent on sustaining the coat in place, she engrossed in the problem of his arm and the hand almost beneath her chin. Presently the timid girl found the silence too voiceful, and ventured,

"The play was beautiful."

"I thought — everything — was beautiful," assented Bill warmly.

Silence again, sweet — oh, sweet — but dreadfully heart-shaking. The wheels whirred like rims of silver.

"What makes him drive so fast?" complained Bill.

"We 're almost there," she sighed.

"Are you sorry — Linnie?"

Her drooping brought the warm, soft chin full into his palm.

"Look at me — dear — Linnie," he murmured brokenly.

The great dark, liquid eyes flashed full into his. Her exquisite, tremulous mouth was raised and the boy's lips, no less tremulous, met it. For one long moment there was nothing in life but this. Bill held all his world to him, with that strong young arm; Linnie poured out her heart in a rapture of worship that acclaimed him its king. But presently she drew back a little, remembering a girl's teachings.

"Oh — we — you — you must n't," she breathed confusedly.

And upon the instant an obsequious black face bent down to the little window and shouted in at them, "Dis yo' corner, Mars' Bill?"

It would be a colder day when Bill next interceded with his grandfather and even argued with Poly Bony's parent to get that inept wretch a cab. Cab driver! he had n't the first inklings of the ethics of such a calling! But of course a creature, shut out from Paradise, driving only through wintry streets, was liable to take such unmannerly revenge.

With a wild start both young creatures sat erect. Bill called out something sharply in that older voice which was beginning to be tolerably familiar to the girl, the carriage halted and he jumped out.

"Sit here — dear," he whispered, stepped forward and said to Napoleon, "We dare n't go any closer. Miss Starr may have got home," then came back and helped her out.

The dream still held them. Silently they walked together around the corner with the street lamp shining on the light crust of snow that mottled grass and

bushes. And there before the old shop they paused in dismay. The front windows glared with light, and on the blind of one they got the silhouette of a familiar, high-nosed profile. Their dream lay shattered about them. Bill looked at the frightened girl, and that square jaw of his came into prominence.

"We 're up against it, Linnie," he said. "She 's got home — and found that you 're out. You let me tend to her — I 'll do the talking."

Lynette clung to him trembling.

"Oh — what are you going to do?" she quavered.

"I 'm going to walk up the front steps and ring the bell like a man, and tell your grandmother the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, about this business," he said doggedly. "Don't you worry. It 'll come out all right."

His knees quaked a bit, but his voice had the true ring, manly and protecting, and she leaned her head against his arm without being quite aware of what she was doing.

"You — could n't you just lift me up to the window first?" she pleaded in a small, frightened voice. "I 'm glad you 're so brave, but — but you know, I 'm not a bit. I 'm horribly frightened."

"Too late," said Bill. "Too late, dear. Don't be scared," and he pulled the bell.

The door leaped back as though the boy had dynamited it and there was Miss Missouri Starr glaring at them.

"Well!" she cried. Then on a higher, shriller note, "Well!"

"Oh," breathed Lynette in an agony, hanging back, "I wish I'd had you try to help me up to the window."

"Miss Starr," Bill's voice was loud and confident because he was for once in his life thoroughly frightened, "I have just had the honor of escorting your niece to the theater."

The angry woman looked them sardonically up and down; her glance cheapened the situation. Apparently her interview with Mrs. Sivley had been unsatisfactory. No doubt it turned out to be a begging device instead of a death-bed.

"Well?" she cried for the third time, apparently unable for anger to get beyond the single word. The interrogation fired point-blank at them seemed to dismay even the broad-shouldered young champion who faced her.

"And now we — we've come back," he offered the somewhat inadequate addition.

"You've come back, have you, Miss, after such a caper as this — after being Heaven knows where, wearing a shawl I never put eyes on!" Miss Starr was working herself up to the necessary point. "You ought n't to be allowed to come in till you've — you shan't! You shan't put your foot inside of this house till you've — a girl like you —" She was going on in jerks, her voice rising with each sentence. Bill feared some passer-by might overhear.

"Grandmother — Grandmother — I will explain," Lynette pleaded, creeping close.

Miss Starr felt that she had conquered — she had

made her point; and in the intoxication of her rage, she thrust the poor little drooping figure back. Instantly Bill caught Linnie, as she stumbled and recoiled. He drew her arm through his and turned quickly, without a backward look, saying in a sharp, practical tone,

"I 'll take her home to my mother." He held the small hand, where it lay on his coat sleeve. "Come, Linnie," he murmured.

He hurried her down the steps, the girl clinging mutely to him, the woman in the doorway declaring,

"You can't frighten me, pretending to go away. You 'll find the door locked when you come back."

"Never mind, dear — never mind," soothed Bill. "You are n't afraid, are you, Linnie? Your grandmother 'll be sorry for this the longest day she lives. My mother 'll take care of you — you 'll see."

"But it 's so dreadful," came the choked voice. "What 'll you tell her about me? What 'll she think?"

"I 'll tell her that I —" the young bass broke. "Linnie I won't have to tell her anything — you 'll see."

In silence they reached the corner.

"There 's the carriage," cried Bill relieved, as they came into the main street, and saw the two yellow eyes looking at them from before an all night cigar store. "Stand here a moment, Linnie. I 'll go and fetch Poly Bony."

Mrs. Harvey, sitting late over the fire waiting for her son, heard with a little thrill of surprise two people

come up the walk. "He 's bringing home company," she murmured, and hurried out into the hall.

But the light step that crossed the porch was not that of another young fellow, and as the door swung open to the stumbling little vision in a pink frock, that ravishing, exotic beauty of Lynette's in disarray, the dark hair rumpled, the dark eyes wide and pain-filled, Mrs. Harvey's own white shawl hanging from bare arms and shoulders — a poor little love, trailing broken white pinions — the older woman's look was incredulous. In vain that piteous, trembling mouth tried to speak. Bill, feeling that all was well now, turned to close the door, as the two silently approached each other. Suddenly one end of the white shawl tripped its wearer; Mrs. Harvey caught in her arms the visitant which, up to that moment, she had been telling herself was unreal.

"Hold on to her, Mother," Bill tried to speak jocosely; "don't let her get away. I brought her for you to keep. She 's yours now. You said you wanted a daughter — there she is."

Bill's mother was reminded of the days when he used to bring home stray, wounded creatures — starved nestlings or abused kittens. The girl in her arms burst into violent sobs, and hid her face against the welcome maternal shoulder. Mrs. Harvey tightened her arm about the slim, shaken figure, and turned to her son for explanations.

"You see, Linnie's grandmother —" he grimaced expressively above the dark head on his mother's breast, "she was hopping mad. When we got back

from the theater, she talked — well, and she was n't going to let Linnie in, she said. So I brought her to you. There was nothing else to do, was there, Mother?" he concluded.

"No, son, no indeed, there was nothing else to do. Go upstairs now, dear, and leave me to take care of her. See, she 's quieter already, and we 'll get along without you."

He went — but it was not upon any stairway built by men that he seemed to himself to be ascending. At the top, just as, with the last step, he was emerging on golden spaces, his head in the rarefied air of Heaven's domain where dreams come true, and never break, but go on and on into immortality, he met his father in dressing-gown and slippers.

"What is it, Bill?" questioned James Harvey. "Bring somebody home with you?"

Bill answered in a word.

"What?" said Harvey, Senior. "Come in and let 's hear about it, boy." So Bill turned back to his father's room, and there, the elder once more under his blankets, the younger sitting on the bed beside him, the story was told over again as a man tells it to a man.

"Well — well — Lynette Starr," said Bill's father, "one of the magnificent, ill-fated Starrs; and a beauty, you say? It 's an ambitious match, Bill."

"Wait till you see her," remarked Bill. "You 'll say, just like Aunt Candace, that I 'm sure out-marryin' myself."

"You 're young — too young," the older man went on. "And yet I don't know. A fellow of your sort

never amounts to anything till he finds the right woman — or she finds him. God send this is the right one."

"Wait till you see her," repeated Bill securely. Then in a musing tone, "I suppose I 'll have to be getting used to my full name; a married man can't be Bill."

"Your cousin abbreviates it to Wm.," remarked Mr. Harvey.

Soft slippered feet came up the stair. The young fellow rose. His father watched the William-ness and Bill-ness struggling in the face that listened to them. They paused on the landing.

"Bill," called his mother's voice, "come and bid her good-night. It 's late."

"William," breathed a whisper after it, "I 'm waiting."

THE END

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